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THE HAPPY ISLES



BOOKS BY BASIL KING

The Happy Isles
The Dust Flower
The Thread of Flame
The City of Comrades
Abraham's Bosom
The Empty Sack
Going West
The Side of the Angels

Harper & Brothers
Publishers



"THEY'LL SAY I STOLE HIM. IT'LL BE TWENTY YEARS FOR ME"

THE HAPPY ISLES

By *BASIL KING*

Author of

"THE EMPTY SACK," "THE INNER SHRINE,"

"THE DUST FLOWER," ETC.

With Illustrations by
JOHN ALONZO WILLIAMS



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ILLUSTRATIONS

"THEY'LL SAY I STOLE HIM. IT 'LL BE TWENTY
YEARS FOR ME *Frontispiece*

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The Happy Isles

Many a green isle needs must be
In the deep wide sea of misery,
Or the mariner, worn and wan,
Never thus could voyage on,
Day and night, and night and day. . . .

—SHELLEY.

I

AT eight months of age his only experience of life had been one of well-being. He was fed when hungry; he slept when sleepy; he woke when he had slept enough. When bored or annoyed or uneasy he could cry. If crying brought him attentions it was that much to the good; if the effort was thrown away it did no one any harm. Even when least fertile of results it was a change from the crowing and gurgling which were all he had to distract him when left to his own company.

Though his mind worked in co-operation with the subconscious more than with the conscious, it worked actively. In waking minutes there was everything to observe and register.

His intimate needs being met, there were the phenomena of light and darkness. He knew not only the difference between them, but in a general way when to expect the turn of each. He knew that light brought certain formalities, chiefly connected with his

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person, and that darkness brought certain others. The reasons remained obscure, but the variety was pleasing.

Then there was the room, or rather the spectacular surroundings of his universe. The nursery was his earth, his atmosphere, his firmament, the ether in which his heavenly bodies went rolling away into the infinite. And, just as with grown-up people, the nearness and distance of Mars or Sirius or Betelgeuse have gone through experimental stages of guesswork first and calculation afterwards, so the exact location of the wardrobe, the table, or the mantelpiece, was a subject for endless wonderment. At times they were apparently so close that he would put out his hand to touch them from his crib; but at once they receded, fixing themselves against the light-blue walls, home of a menagerie of birds and animals, with something between him and them which he was learning to recognize as space.

There was also motion. Certain things remained in place; other things could move. He himself could move, but that was so near the fundamental necessities as hardly to call for notice. True, there were discoveries even here. The day when he learned that once his legs were freed he could lie on his back and kick was one of emancipation. In finding that he could catch his foot with his hands and put it in his mouth he made his first advance in skill. But there was motion superior to this. There were beings who walked about the room, who entered it and left it. Merely to watch their goings and comings sent spasms through his feet.

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Little by little he had come to discern in these creatures a difference in function and personality. Enormous in size, irresistible in strength, they were nevertheless his satellites. One of them supplied his wants; another worshipped him; the third lifted him up, carried him about, tickled him deliciously with his mustache or his bushy outstanding eyebrows, and otherwise entertained him. For the first his tongue essayed the syllables, Na-Na; for the second his lips rose and fell with an explosive Ma-Ma; the last sent his tongue clicking toward the roof of his mouth in the harsher sound of Da-Da; and yet between these efforts and the accomplishment there was still some lack of correspondence.

Of his many enthralling interests speech was the most magical. In his analysis of life it came to him early that these coughings and barkings and gruntings were meant to express thought. He himself had thoughts. What he lacked was the connection of the sounds with the ideas, and of this he was not unaware. They supposed him a little animal who could only eat and sleep, when all the while he was listening, recording, distinguishing, defining, correlating the syllable with the thing that was evidently meant, so that later he should astonish his circle by uttering a word. It was a stimulating game and in it his daily progress was not far short of marvelous.

If the nursery was his universe, his crib was his private domain, cushioned and soft, and as spotless as an ermine's nest. It was a joy to wake up in it, and equally a joy to go to sleep. Joy, Tenderness, and Comfort, were the only elements in life with

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which he was acquainted. Thriving on them as he throve on the carefully prepared formulas of his food, he grew in the spirit without obstacles to struggle with, as his body grew in the sunlight and the air.

By the time he had reached the May morning on which his story begins he had come to take Comfort, Tenderness, and Joy, as life's essentials. Never having known anything else, he had no suspicion that anything else would lurk within the possible. The ritual that attended his going out was as much a matter of course to him as a red carpet to tread on is to a queen. He took it for granted that, when he had been renewed by bottle and bath, she for whom he tried to say Na-Na would be in a flutter of preparation, while she whose sweet smile forced the Ma-Ma to his lips would put a little coat on his back, a little cap on his head, little mittens on his hands, and smother him with adoration all the time she was doing it.

On this particular morning these things had been done. Nestled into a canopied crib on wheels, he was ready for the two gigantic ministrants whom he could not yet distinguish as the first and second footmen. These colossi lifted his vehicle down the steps, to set it on the pavement of Fifth Avenue, where for the time being dramatic episodes were at an end. The town didn't interest him. Moreover, a filmy curtain, to protect him against flies as well as against too much sun, having shut him in from the vastness of the scene, he had nothing to do but let himself be lulled to his customary slumber.

II

MISS NASH, the baby carriage in front of her, furrowed a way through the traffic of the avenue, relatively scant in those days, and reaching the safety of the other side passed within the Park. She was a trained child's-nurse, and wore a uniform. England being at that time the only source of this specialty, examples in New York were limited to the heirs-apparent of the noble families. Between a nurse-maid and a trained child's-nurse you will notice the same distinction as between a lady's maid and a princess's lady-in-waiting.

Having entered the Park, Miss Nash stopped the carriage to lift the veil protecting her charge. He was already beyond the noises and distractions of the planet in his rosy, heavenly sleep. Miss Nash smiled wistfully, because it was the only way in which she could smile at all. A superior woman by nature, she clung to that refinement which best expresses itself in something melancholic. Daughter of a solicitor's clerk and niece to a curate, she felt her status as a lady most fittingly preserved in an atmosphere delicate, subdued, and rather sad.

And yet when she looked on her little boy asleep she was no longer superior, and scarcely so much as a lady. She was only a woman enraptured before

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one of those babies so compact of sweetness, affection, and intelligence that they tug at the heartstrings. She was on her guard as to loving her children overmuch, since it made it so hard to give them up when the minute for doing so arrived; but with this little fellow no guard had been effective. Whether he crowed, or cried, or kicked, or snuggled in her arms to croon with her in baby tunelessness, she found him adorable. But when he was asleep, chubby, seraphic, so awesomely undefiled, she was sure that his spirit had withdrawn from her for a little while to commune with the angels.

“No,” she confessed one day to her friend, Miss Etta Messenger, the only other uniformed child’s nurse among her acquaintance in New York, “it won’t do. I must break myself. I shall have to leave him some day. But I do envy the mother who will have him always.”

“It don’t pay you,” Miss Messenger declared, as one who has had experience. “Anyone, I always say, can hire my services; but my affections remain my own. Now this little girl I’m with while I’m in New York, I could leave her to-morrow without a pang if—but then I’ve got something to leave her *for*.”

“And what does he say to things now?” Miss Nash inquired, with selfless interest in her friend’s drama.

Miss Messenger answered, judicially, “I’ve put it to him straight. I’ve told him he must simply fix a date to marry me, or give me up. As I know he simply won’t give me up—you never knew a fellow so wild about a girl as he is about me . . .”

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The fortnight which had intervened between that conversation and the morning when our little boy's story opens had given time for Miss Messenger's affairs to take another turn. In the hope of learning the details of this turn Miss Nash sought a corner of the Park, not much frequented by nursemaids, where she and Miss Messenger often met, but Etta was not there. Drawing the carriage within the shade of a miniature grove of lilacs in perfumed flower, Miss Nash once more lifted the veil, wiped the precious mouth, and adjusted the coverlet outside which lay the mittened baby hands. Since there was no more to be done, she sat down on a convenient bench to her reading of *Juliet Allingham's Sin*.

In the scene where the lover drowns she became so absorbed as not to notice that on a bench on the other side of a lilac bush Miss Messenger came and installed herself and her baby carriage in the shade of a near-by fan-shaped elm, bronze-green in its young leafage. Miss Nash looked up only when, her emotions having grown so poignant, she could read no more. She was drying her eyes when, through the branches of the lilac, the flutter of a nurse's cape told her that her friend must have arrived.

"Why, Etta!"

On going round the barrier she found herself greeted by what she had come to call Etta's fighting eyes. They were fine flashing black eyes, set in a face which Miss Nash was further accustomed to describe as "high-complexioned." Miss Messenger spoke listlessly, and yet as one who knew her mind.

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"I saw you. I thought I wouldn't interrupt. I haven't very good news."

Miss Nash glided to a seat beside her friend, seizing both her hands. "Oh, my dear, he hasn't——?"

"That's just what he has." Etta nodded, drily. "Bring your baby round here and I'll tell you."

But Miss Nash couldn't wait. "He's all right there. He's sound asleep. I'll hear him if he stirs. Do tell me what's happened."

"Well, he simply says that if that's the way I feel perhaps we'd better call it off."

"And are you going to?"

Etta's eyes blazed with their black flames. "Call it off? Me? Not much, I won't."

"Still if he won't fix a date . . ."

"He'll jolly well fix a date—or meet me in the court."

"Oh, but, Etta, you wouldn't . . ."

"I don't say I would for choice. There are two or three other things I could do, and I think I'll try them first."

"What sort of things?"

In the answer to that question Miss Nash was even more absorbed than in Juliet Allingham's sin. Juliet Allingham was after all but a creature of the brain; whereas Etta Messenger's adventures might conceivably be her own. It was not merely some one else's love story that held her imagination in thrall; it was the possibility that one of these days she, Milly Nash, might have a man playing fast and loose with her heart's purest offering. . . .

III

ANYONE closely watching the strange woman would have said that her first care was not to seem distraught; but then, no one was closely watching her. On a rapturous May morning, with the lilac scenting the air, and the tulip beds in only the passing of their glory, there were so many things better worth doing than observing a respectably dressed young woman, probably the wife of an artisan, that she went unobserved. As there were at that very minute some two or three hundred more or less like her also pushing babies in the Park, the eye that singled her out for attention would have had more than the gift of sight.

What she did that was noticeable—again had there been anyone to notice her—was to approach first one little group and then another, quickly sheering away. One would have said that she sheered away from some queer motive of strategy. Her movements might have been called erratic, not because they were aimless, but because she didn't know or didn't find the object of her search. Even if that were so, she neither advanced nor receded, nor drifted hither or yon, more like a lost thing than many another nursemaid giving her charge the air or killing time.

There was nothing sinister about her, unless it was

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sinister to have moments of seeming dazed or of muttering to herself. She muttered to herself only when sure that there was no one to overhear, and with similar self-command she indulged in looking dazed only when she knew that no eye could light on her. As if aware of abnormality, she schooled herself to a semblance of sanity. Otherwise she was some thirty years of age, neatly if cheaply clad, and too commonplace and unimportant for the most observant to remember her a second after she had passed.

At sight of a little hooded vehicle, standing unguarded where the lilac bushes made a shrine for it, she paused. Again, the pause was natural. She might have been tired. Pushing a baby carriage in a park is always futile work, with futile starts and stops and turnings in this direction or in that. If she stood to reconnoiter or to make her plans there was no power in the land to interfere with her.

Her further methods were simple. Behind the bench on which Miss Nash and Miss Messenger were by this time entering on an orgy of romantic confidence there rose a gentle eminence. To the top of this hill the strange woman made her way. She made it with precautions, sauntering, dawdling, simulating all the movements of the perfect nurse. When two women, wheeling young laddies strapped into go-carts, crossed her path she walked slowly till they were out of sight. When a park attendant with a lawnmower clicked his machine along to cut a distant portion of the greensward, she waited till he too had disappeared. A few pedestrians were scattered

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here and there, but so distant as not to count. A few riders galloped up or down the bridle-path near Fifth Avenue, but these too she could disregard. Except for Miss Nash and Miss Messenger, turned towards each other, and with their backs to her, she had the world to herself. Softly she crept down the hill; softly she stole in among the lilacs.

“My little Gracie! my little Gracie!” she kept muttering, but only between closed lips. “My little Gracie!”

“Oh, don’t think, Milly,” Miss Messenger was saying, “that I shan’t give him the chance to come across honorable. I shall. You say that an action for breach doesn’t seem to you delicate, and I don’t say but what I shrink from it. But when you’ve a trunkful of letters simply burning with passion, simply *burning* with it, what good are they to you if you don’t? . . . And he’s worth fifty thousand dollars if he’s worth a penny. Don’t talk to me! A fish-monger, right in the heart of East Eighty-eighth Street, the very best district. . . . If I sue for twenty-five thousand dollars I’d be pretty sure of getting five . . . and with a sympathetic jury, possibly six or eight . . . and with all that money I could set up a little nursing home in London . . . say in the Portland Place neighborhood . . . with a specialty in children’s diseases . . . and put you in charge of it as matron. You and me together . . .”

“Oh, but, Etta, I couldn’t leave my little boy, not till he’s able to do without me. By that time there may be other children for me to take care of, so that

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I could keep near him. I've thought of that. He being the first, and his father and mother such a fine healthy young couple, with everything to support a big family . . .”

During the minutes which marked his transfer from one destiny to another, Miss Nash's little boy remained in the sweet, blest country to which little babies go in dreams. When a swift hand raised the veil, lifting him with deft gentleness, he knew nothing of what was happening. While the cap was peeled from his head and pulled over that of a big, featureless rag doll shaped to the outlines of a baby's limbs, he was still on the lap of Miss Nash's angels. On the lap of these angels he stayed during the rest of the exchange. The strange woman's hand was tender. Lightly it drew over the little boy's head the soiled, cheap bonnet worn by the big rag doll; lightly it laid the little warm body into its new bed. Where he had nestled the big rag doll with his cap on its head gave a fair imitation of his form, unless inspected closely. By the time the veils were lowered on the two little carriages there was nothing for the most suspicious eye to wonder at. A respectable woman of the humbler classes was trundling her baby back to its home. The infant rested quietly.

The rag doll, too, rested quietly when Miss Nash returned to her charge, as Miss Messenger to hers. Miss Nash had heard so much within an hour that she was not quite mistress of herself. Nothing was so rare with her as to neglect the due examination of her child, but this time she neglected it. Etta had given her so much to think of that for the minute her

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mind was over-taxed. Because the love theme had become involved with the compelling dictates of self-interest, which even a sweet creature like Miss Nash couldn't overlook, she laid her hands absently on the push-bar, beginning to make her way homeward. There was no question as to Etta's worldly wisdom. The choice lay between worldly wisdom and the warm, glowing, human thing we call affection. In Milly Nash's experience it was the first time such a choice had been put up to her.

"Don't talk to me!" Miss Etta pursued, as they sauntered along side by side. "I simply love my children up to every penny I'm paid for it, not a farthing more; and if you'll take my advice, Milly Nash, you'll follow my example."

Miss Nash felt humble, rebuked. Through fear of disturbing her little boy, she pushed as gently as a zephyr blows.

"I'm not sure that I could measure it out, not with this little fellow."

"This little fellow, fiddlesticks! He's just like any other little fellow."

"Oh, no, he isn't. There's character in babies just as there is in grown-up people. This child's got it strong, all sweetness and loveliness, and so much sense—you'd never believe it! Why, he knows—there's nothing that he doesn't know, in his own dear little way. I tell you, Etta, that if you had him you'd feel just like me."

"Just like you and be out of your heart's job—your heart's job, mind you—as soon as he's four years old, and they want to put him with a French

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girl to learn French. Oh, I know them, these aristocrats! When I get my alimony, or whatever it is, I'm simply going to provide for the future, and you'll be a goose, Milly Nash, if you simply don't come with me, and do the same."

While Miss Nash was shaking her head with her gentle perplexed smile, the strange woman was crossing Fifth Avenue. Having accomplished this feat, she entered one of the streets running from that great thoroughfare toward the East River. Squalor being so much the rule in New York, the wealthier classes find it hard to pre-empt to themselves more than a long thin streak, relatively trim, bearing to the general disorder the proportion of a brook to the meadow through which it runs. The strange woman had left Fifth Avenue but a few hundred yards away before she and her baby were swallowed up in that kind of human swarm in which individuals lose their identity. Afraid of betraying some frenzy she knew to be within her by mumbling to herself, she kept her lips shut with a fierce, determined tightness. She was a little woman, and when you looked at her closely you saw that she had once possessed a wild dark prettiness. Even now, as she pushed her way between uncouth men and women, or screaming children at play, her wild dark eyes blazed with sudden anger or swam with unshed tears by fits and turns.

The house at which she stopped was hardly to be distinguished from thousands of others in which a brief brownstone dignity had fallen, first to the boarding-house stage, and then to that of tenements. From the top of a flight of brownstone steps a frowzy,

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buxom, motherly woman came lumbering down to lend a hand with the baby carriage.

“So you’ve brought your baby, Mrs. Coburn. Now you’ll be able to get settled.”

The reply came as if it had been learned by rote. “Yes, now I’ll be able to get settled. I’ve got her crib ready, though all my other things is strewed about just as when I moved in. Still, the crib’s ready, which is the main thing. She’s a fretful baby by nature, so you mustn’t think it funny if you hear her cry. Some people thought I’d never raise her, so that if you ever hear say that my little girl died . . .”

“I’ll know it’s not true,” the buxom woman laughed. “She couldn’t die, and you have her here, now could she? Do let me have a peep.”

By this time they had lifted the carriage over the steps and into the little passageway. Seeing that there was no help for this inspection, the strange woman trembled but resigned herself. The neighbor lifted the veil, and peered under it.

“My, what a love! And she don’t look sick, not a little mite.”

“Not her face, she don’t. Her poor little body’s some wasted, but then so long as I’ve got her . . .”

“I believe as it’d be too much limewater in her milk. She’s bottle-fed, ain’t she? Well, them bottle-fed babies—I’ve had two of ’em out of my five—you got to try and try, and ten to one you’ll find as it’s that nasty lime-water that upsets ’em.”

Having unlocked her door, which was on the left of the passageway, the strange woman pulled her treasure into a room stuffy with closed windows, and

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dim with drawn blinds. Turning the key behind her, she was alone at last.

She fell on her knees, throwing the veil back with a fierceness that almost tore it off. She strained forward. Her breath came in racking, panting sobs.

"My Gracie! my Gracie! God didn't take you! God wouldn't be so mean! I just dreamed it, and now I've waked up."

Suddenly she changed. Drawing backward, she put her hands to her brow and pressed them down the whole length of her face. Her eyes filled with horror. Her face turned sallow. Her lips fell apart.

"I'll get twenty years for this. Perhaps it'll be more. I don't think they hang for it, but it'll be twenty years anyhow, if they find it out." She sprang up, still muttering in broken, only partly articulated phrases. "But they'll never find it out. What's there to find? It's my baby! My precious only baby!" She was on her knees again, dragging herself forward by the sides of the little carriage, her eyes strained toward the infant face. "My little Gracie! I've missed you all the time you've been away. My heart was near broke. Now you've come back to me. You're mine—mine—mine!"

He opened his eyes. It was his usual hour for waking up. For the first time in his history amazement gave an expression to his face which it was often to wear afterward. Instead of being in his own nest, downy, clean, and scentless, he was in a humpy little hole unpleasant to his senses. Instead of the Na-Na with her tender smile, or the Ma-Ma with her love, he saw this terrifying woman's stormy

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eyes, rousing the sensation he was later to know as fear. Instead of his nursery, spotless and gay, he was dumped amid the forlorn disarray of furniture that has just been moved into an empty tenement. Without getting these impressions in detail, he got them at once. He got them not as separate facts, but as facts in a single quintessence, distilled and distilled again, till no one element can be told from any other element, and held to his lips in a poisoned draught.

All he could do was to wail, but he wailed with a note of anguish which was new to him. It was anguish the more bitter because of the lack of explanation. His only awareness hitherto had been that of power. He had been a baby sovereign, obeyed without having to command. Now he had been born again as a baby serf, into conditions against which his will, imperious in its baby way, would beat in vain. Once more, he knew this, not by reasoned argument, of course, but by heartbroken instinct. It was not merely the distress of the present that was in his cry, but dread of the future. There was something else in the world besides Comfort, Tenderness, and Joy, and he had touched it. Without knowing what it was he shrank back from the contact and sobbed.

And yet such is the need for love in any young thing's heart, that when the strange woman had lifted him up, and cradled him on her bosom, he was partly soothed. He was not soothed easily. Though she held him closely, and sang to him softly, seated in the low rocking-chair in which she had rocked her

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baby-girl, he went on sobbing. He sobbed, not as he had sobbed in his old nursery, for the sport or the mischief of the thing, but because his inner being had been bruised. But his capacity for sobbing wore itself out. Little by little the convulsions grew calmer, the agony less desperate. Love held him. It was not the love of the Ma-Ma or the Na-Na, but it was love. It had love's embrace, love's lullaby. Arms were about him, he was on a breast. The shipwrecked sailor may be only on a raft, but he is not sinking. Little by little he turned his face into this only available refuge. A dangling embroidery adorned it, and in his struggle not to go down his little hands clutched at that.

IV

HIS first conscious recollection was of sitting on a high chair drawn up to a table at which he was having a meal. He could never recall whether this was in Harlem, Hoboken, Brooklyn, Jersey City, or the Bronx. Because they moved so often he had little more memory of places than he had of clouds. Tenements, streets, and suburbs of New York melted into one big sense of squalor. It was not squalor to him because he was used to it. It only obscured the difference between one dwelling and another, as monotony always obscures remembrance. Wherever their wanderings carried them, the background was the same, crowded, dirty, seething, a breeding place rather than a home.

What marked this occasion was a question he asked and the answer he got back.

“Mudda, id my name Gracie, or id it Tom?”

The mother spoke sharply, as she whisked about the kitchen. “What do you want to know for?”

The question was difficult. He knew what he wanted to know for, and yet it wasn't easy to explain. The nearest he could get to it in language was to say: “I'm a little boy, ain't I?”

“Yes, you're a little boy, but you should have been a little girl. It was a little girl I wanted.”

“But you want me, don't you, mudda?”

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She dropped whatever she was doing to press his head fiercely against her side. "Yes, I want *you!* I want *you!* I want *you!*"

He remembered this paroxysm of affection not because it was special but because it was connected with his gropings after his identity. Paroxysms were what he lived on. They were of love or of anger or of something which frightened him and yet was nameless. He thrummed to himself, beating time on the table with his spoon, while he worked on to another point.

"Wadn't there never no Gracie, mudda?"

She wheeled round from the gas-stove. "For goodness' sake, what's putting this into your head? Of course there was a Gracie. You're her. You don't suppose I stole you, do you?"

He ceased his thrumming; he ceased to beat on the table with his spoon. The mystery of being grew still more baffling.

"Mudda!"

"What's it now?"

"If I wad Gracie I'd be a little girl, wouldn't I?"

She stamped her foot. "Stop it! If you ask me another thing I'll slap you."

He stopped it, not because he was afraid of being slapped. Accustomed to that he had learned to discount its ferocity. A sharp stinging smart, it passed if you grinned and bore it, and grinning and bearing had already entered his life as part of its philosophy. If for the minute he asked no more questions it was in order not to vex his mudda. She was easily vexed; she easily lost her self-control; she was easily

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repentant. It was her repentance that he feared. It was so violent, so overwhelming. He loved love; he loved caressing; he loved to sit in her lap and sing with her; but her tempests of self-reproach alarmed him.

As she washed the dishes or switched about the kitchen, he watched her with that trepidation which makes the children of the poor sharp-witted. Though under five years of age, he was already developing a sense of responsibility. You could see it in the gravity of a wholly straightforward little face, which had the even tan of a healthy fairness, in keeping with his crisp ashen hair. He knew when the moment had come to clamber down from his perch, and snuggle himself against her petticoats.

“Mudda, sing!”

“I can’t sing now. Don’t you see I’m busy! Look out, or this hot dish-water’ll scald you.”

Nevertheless, a few minutes later they were settled in the rocking chair, he on her knee, with his cheek against her shoulder. She was not as ungracious as her words would have made her seem, a fact of which he was aware.

“What’ll I sing, Troublesome?”

“Sing ‘Three Cups of Cold Poison.’ ”

So she sang in a sweet, true voice, the sort of childish voice which children love, her little boy joining in with her whenever he knew the words, but with only a hit-or-miss venture at the tune.

“Where have you been dining, Lord Ronald, my son?”

“Where have you been dining, my handsome young man?”

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“I’ve been dining with my true love, mither, make my bed soon,
There’s a pain in my heart, and I fain would lie doon.”

“And what did she give you, Lord Ronald, my son?
And what did she give you, my handsome young man?”
“Three cups of cold poison, mither, make my bed soon,
There’s a pain in my heart, and I fain would lie doon.”

“What’ll you will to your mither, Lord Ronald, my son?
What’ll you will to your mither, my handsome young man?”
“My gowd and my silver, mither, make my bed soon,
There’s a pain in my heart, and I fain would lie doon.”

“What’ll you will to your brither, Lord Ronald, my son?
What’ll you will to your brither, my handsome young man?”
“My coach and six horses, mither, make my bed soon,
There’s a pain in my heart, and I fain would lie doon.”

“What’ll you will to your truelove, Lord Ronald, my son?
What’ll you will to your truelove, my handsome young man?”
“A rope for to hang her, mither, make my bed soon,
There’s a pain in my heart, and I fain would lie doon.”

His next conscious memory was more dramatic. He had been playing in the street, in what town he could never remember. They had recently moved, but they had always recently moved. A month in one set of rooms, and his mother was eager to be off. Rarely did they ever stay anywhere for more than the time of moving in, giving the necessary notice, and moving out again. When they stayed long enough for him to know a few children he sometimes played with them.

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In this way the thing happened. The boy's name was Frankie Bell, a detail which remained long after the larger facts had escaped him. Frankie Bell and he had been engaged in scraping the dust and offal of the street into neat little piles, with the object of building what they called a "dirt-house." The task was engrossing, and to it little Tom Coburn gave himself with good will. Suddenly, as each bent over his pile, Frankie Bell threw off the observation, casually uttered:

"My mother says your mother's crazy."

Tom Coburn raised himself from his stooping posture, standing straight, and looking straight. The expression in his dark blue eyes, over which the eyebrows even now stood out bushily, was of pain, and yet of pain that left him the more dauntless. Though knowing but vaguely what the word crazy meant, he knew it was insulting.

"She ain't."

Frankie Bell, a stout young man, lifted himself slowly. "Yes, she is. My mother says so."

"Well, your mudda id a liar."

One rush and Frankie Bell lay sprawling with his head in the cushioned softness of his own dirt-heap. The attack had taken him so much by surprise that he went down before he could bellow. Before he could bellow his enemy was upon him, filling his mouth with the materials collected for architectural purposes. Victor in the fray, Tom Coburn ran homeward blinded with his tears.

He found his mother at the stove, stirring something with a tablespoon.

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“Mudda, you’re *not* crazy, *are* you?”

His reply was a blow on the head with the spoon. The woman was beside herself.

“Who said that?”

Rubbing his head, he told her.

“Don’t you ever let them say no such thing again. If you do I’ll kill you.” She threw back her head, her arms outstretched, the spoon in her right hand. “God! God! What’ll they say next? They’ll say I stole him. It’ll be twenty years for me; it’ll be forty; it may be life. I won’t live to begin it. I know what’ll end it before they can . . .”

He was terrified now, terrified as he had never been in all his terrifying moments. Throwing himself upon her, he clutched at her skirts.

“Don’t, mudda, don’t! I’m your little boy! You didn’t steal me. Don’t cry, mudda! Oh, don’t cry! don’t cry!”

When, in one of her sudden reactions, she sank sobbing to the floor, he sank with her, petting her, coaxing her, wiping away her tears, forcing himself to laugh so that she should laugh with him; but a few days afterward they moved.

V

MUDDA, can I have a book and learn to read?" The ambition had been inspired in the street, where he had seen a little boy who actually had a book, and was spelling out the words. Tom Coburn was now nominally six years old, though it was in the nature of things that of his age no exact record could be kept. His mother had changed his birthday so many times that he observed it whenever she said it had come round.

Bursting into the room with his eager question, he found her sitting by a window looking out at a blank wall. Given her feverish restlessness, the attitude called attention to itself. The apartment was poorer and dingier than any they had lived in hitherto, while it had not escaped his observation that she was living on the ragged edge of her nerves. This made him the more sorry for her, and the more loving. He put his hand on her shoulder, tenderly.

"What's the matter, mudda?"

It was one of the minutes when a touch made her frantic. "Get away!"

He got away, not through fear, but because she pushed him. He didn't mind that, though the rejection hurt him inside. He stood in the middle of the floor, pity in his young countenance, wondering what he could do for her, when she spoke again.

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"I've got hardly any money left. I don't know what to do."

It was the first time his attention had been called to finance. He knew there was such a thing as money; he knew it had purchasing value; but he had not known its relation to himself.

"Why don't you get money where you got it before?"

"Because I ain't got a husband to die and leave me another five thousand dollars of insurance."

"And did you have, mudda?"

"Of course I had. What did you think?"

The question voiced his inner difficulty. He had not known what to think. Having observed that a fundamental social unit was formed of husbands and wives, he had also understood that husbands and wives could, in the terms which were the last to hang over from the lingo of his babyhood, be translated into faddas and muddas. They in turn implied children. The methods were mysterious, but the unit was so composed. The exception to this rule seemed to be himself. Though he had a mudda, he could not remember ever to have heard of a fadda. He had pondered on this deficiency more times than anyone suspected. The effort to link himself up with the human family was far more important to him now than the ways and means of getting cash. Standing pensive, he peered into the blinding light, or the unfathomable darkness, whichever it may be, out of which comes human life.

"Mudda, did Gracie have a fadda?"

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She snapped peevishly, her gaze again turned outward to the stone wall. "Of course she did."

He came nearer to his point. "Did I?"

"I—I suppose so."

He approached still nearer. "Did I have the same fadda what Gracie had?"

"No, you hadn't." She caught herself up hurriedly, rounding on him in one of her fits of wrath. "Yes, you had."

The inconsistency was evident. "Well, which was it, mudda?"

She jumped to her feet, threateningly. "Now you quit! The next thing you'll be saying is that your name is Whitelaw, and that I stole you. Take that, you nasty little brat!"

A smack on the cheek brought the color to his face, and the tears to his eyes. "No, I won't, mudda. I won't say you stole me, or that my name is—" oddly enough he had caught it—"or that my name is Whitelaw. My name is Tom Coburn, and I'm your little boy."

Rushing at her in the big outpouring of his love, he threw his arms about her and cried against her waist. He cried so seldom that his grief drove her to one of her paroxysms of repentance. Her self-reproaches abating, all she could do to comfort him was to promise him a book, and begin to teach him to read.

The book was procured two days later, and by a method new to him. Doubtless some other means could have been adopted, but the necessity for sparing pennies had become imperative. Moreover, she had

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never willingly looked at print since the day when she opened a paper to find that, without knowing who she was, all the forces of the country had been organized against her.

They went out together. After traversing a series of streets he had never been in before they stopped in front of a little shop, in the window of which stationery, ink, wallpaper, rubber bands, and books were arranged in artistic confusion. The impression on the fancy of a little boy already groping toward the treasures of the mind was like that made on the tourist in Dresden by the heaped up riches of the Grüne Gewölbe.

The geography of the shop was explained to him before entering. The stationery counter was on the right as soon as you passed the door. The children's books were opposite, on the left. Books forming a cheap circulating library were back of that, and opposite these, where the shop was dark, were the wallpapers, in small, tight rolls on shelves. She was going to inspect wallpapers. The woman in the shop would exhibit them. He would remain alone in the front part of the shop, and close to the counter with the children's books. He was to keep alert and attentive, waiting for a sign which she would give him. When she turned round in the dark part of the shop, and called out, "Are you all right, darling?" he was to understand it as permissible to slip from the counter any small work on which he could lay his hands, and button it up inside his overcoat. He was to do it quickly, keeping his booty out of sight, and above all

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saying nothing about it. The plan was exciting, with a savor of adventure and manly incentive to skill.

If in the Grüne Gewölbe you were told you could take anything you pleased you would have some of Tom Coburn's sense of enchantment as he stood by the book counter, waiting for the sign. He could see his mother dimly. More dimly still he could follow the movements of the shop-woman eager for a sale. Sample after sample, the wallpapers were unrolled, and hung on an easel where their flowers lighted the obscurity. Even at a distance he could do justice to their beauty, but more captivating than their glories were the wonders at his hand. Pages in which children and animals disported in colors far beyond those of nature were piled in neat little rows, and so tempting that he ached for the signal. He couldn't choose; there was too much to choose from. He would put out his hand without looking, guided by fate.

"Are you all right, darling?"

Curiously to the little boy, the question came just when he himself could perceive that the shop-woman had dived beneath the counter for another example of her wares. All the conditions were propitious. No one was entering the shop; no one was looking through the window. Without knowing the moralities of his act, he understood the need for secrecy. He stretched forth his arm. His fingers touched paper. In the fraction of a fraction of a second the object was within his overcoat, and pressed to his pounding heart.

A few minutes later his mother came smiling and chatting down toward the exit, giving her address,

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which the shop-woman jotted in a note-book. "I think it will have to be the pale-green background with the roses. The room is darkish, and it would light it up. But I'll decide by to-morrow, and let you know. Yes, that's right. Mrs. F. H. Grover, 321 Blaisdel Avenue. So much obliged to you. Good morning."

Having bowed themselves out they went some yards up the street before the little boy dared to express his new wonderment.

"Mudda, what did you say you was Mrs. F. H. Grover for? And we don't live on Blaisdel Avenue. We live on Orange Street."

"You mind your own business. Did you get your book? Well, that's what we went for, isn't it?"

The expedition having proved successful, it was tried on other planes. Now it was in the line of groceries; now in that of hardware; now in that of drygoods; now in that of fruit. Needed things could be used; useless things could be sold, especially after they had moved to distant neighborhoods. While the procedure didn't supply an income, it eked out very helpfully such income as remained.

It furnished, moreover, a motive in life, which was what they had lacked hitherto. There was something to which to give themselves. It was like devotion to an art, or even a religion. They could pursue it for its own sake. For her especially this outside interest appeased the wild something which wasted her within. She grew calmer, more reasonable. She slept and ate better. She had fewer fits of frenzy.

With but faint pangs of misgiving the little boy

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enjoyed himself. He enjoyed his finesse; he enjoyed the pride his mother took in him. In proportion as they grew more expert they enlarged their field, often reversing their rôles. There were times when he created the distraction, while she secreted any object within reach. They did this the more frequently after she became recognized as his superior in selection.

For a superior in selection the great department stores naturally offered the widest field for operation. They approached them, however, cautiously, going in and out and out and in for a good many days before they ventured on anything. When they did this at last it was amid the crowding and pushing of a bargain day.

The system evolved had the masterly note of simplicity. The little boy carried a satchel, of the kind in which school-boys sometimes carry books. He stood near his mudda, or farther away, according to the dictates of the moment's strategy. On the first occasion he kept close to her, sincerely admiring a display of colored silk scarves conspicuously marked down to the price at which it was intended, even before their importation, that they should be sold. Women thronged about the counter, the little boy and his mudda having much ado to edge themselves into the front to where these products of the loom could be handled.

The picking and choosing done, the mother still showed some indecision.

"I'll just ask my sister to step over here," she confided to the saleswoman. "Her judgment is so much better than mine. Run over, dear, to your Aunt

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Mary," she begged of the boy, "and ask her to come and speak to me." Holding the scarf noticeably in her hands, she smiled at the saleswoman affably. "I'll just make room for this lady, who seems to be in a hurry."

She did not step back; she merely allowed herself to be crowded out. From the front row she receded to the second, from the second to the third. Keeping in sight of the saleswoman, she looked this way and that, plainly for Aunt Mary to appear. At times she made little dashes, as Aunt Mary seemed to come within sight. From these she did not fail to return, but on each occasion to a point more distant from that of her departure. With sufficient time the poor saleswoman, who had fifty other customers to attend to, would be likely to forget her, for a few minutes if no more.

The moment seemed to have come. With the scarf thrown jauntily over her arm where anyone could see it, the mother forced her way amid the crowds in search of her little boy. If intercepted she had her explanation. He had gone on an errand, and had not come back. When she had found him she would return and pay for the scarf, or decide not to take it. Her story couldn't help being plausible.

"Aunt Mary" was a spot agreed upon near one of the side doors, and far from the center of interest in silk scarves. Agreed upon was also a little bit of comedy, for the benefit of possible lookers-on.

"Oh, my dear, I've kept you waiting so long. I'm so sorry. Tell your mother this is the best I could do for her. I knew you were waiting, so I didn't let

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the lady wrap it up. Open your bag, and I'll put it in."

The bag closed, the little boy went out through one door, and his mother through another. The point where she was to rejoin him was not so far away but that he could walk to it alone.

VI

IT'S all right, mudda, isn't it?"

He asked this after their campaign had been carried on for a good part of a year, and when they were nearing Christmas. He was now supposed to be seven. For reasons he could not explain the great game lost its zest. In as far as he understood himself he hated the sneaking and the secrecy. He hated the lying too, but lying was so much a part of their everyday life that he might as well have hated bread.

"Of course it's all right," his mother snapped. "Haven't I said so time and again? We get away with it, don't we? And if it wasn't all right we shouldn't be able to do that."

Silenced by this reasoning, even if something in his heart was not convinced by it, he prepared for the harvest of the festival. Christmas was an exciting time, even to Tom Coburn. Perhaps it was more exciting to him than to other boys, since he had so much to do with shops. As long ago as the middle of November he had noted the first stirrings of new energy. After that he had watched the degrees through which they had ripened to a splendor in which toys, books, skis, skates, sleds, and all the paraphernalia of young joyousness, made a bright thing of the world. Where there was so much, the profusion went beyond desire. One of these objects

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at a time, or two, or three, might have found him envious; but he couldn't cope with such abundance. He could concentrate, therefore, all the more on the pair of fur-lined mittens which his mother promised him, if, as she expressed it, they could haul it off.

By Christmas Eve they had not done so. They had hauled off other things—a purse, a lady's shopping bag, several towels, a selection of pen-trays, some pairs of stockings, a bottle of shoe-polish, a baby's collapsible rubber bathtub, a hair-brush, an electric toaster, with other articles of no great interest to a little boy. Moreover, only some of these things were for personal use; the rest would be sold discreetly after the next moving. It was in the nature of the case that such grist as came to their mill should be more or less as it happened. They could pick, but they couldn't choose, at least to no more than a limited degree. Fur-lined mittens didn't come their way.

The little boy's heart began to ache with a great fear. Perhaps he shouldn't get them. Unless he got them by Christmas Day the spell of the occasion would be gone. To get them a week later wouldn't be the same thing. It would not be Christmas. He couldn't remember having kept a Christmas hitherto. He couldn't remember ever having longed for what might be called an article of luxury. The yearning was new to him, and because new, it consumed him. Whenever he thought that the happiness might after all elude him he had to grind his teeth to keep back a sob, but he could not prevent the filling of his eyes with tears.

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It was not only Christmas Eve but late in the day before the mother found her opportunity. At half-past five the counter where fur-lined mittens were displayed was crowded with poor women who hadn't had the money or the time to make their purchases earlier. In among them pressed Tom Coburn's mother, making her selection, and asking the price.

"Now where's that boy? His hands grow so quick that I can't be sure of anything without trying them on."

With a despairing smile at the saleswoman, she followed her usual tactics of being elbowed from the counter, while she looked about vainly for the boy. At the right moment she slipped into the pushing, struggling mass of tired women, where she could count on being no more remarked than a single crow in a flock. The mittens were in the muff which was the prize of an earlier expedition. At a side door the boy was waiting where she had left him. Without pausing for words she whispered commandingly.

"Come along quick."

He went along quick, but also happily, projecting himself into the "surprise" to which he would wake on Christmas morning.

They had reached the sidewalk when a hand was laid on the mother's shoulder.

"Will you come back a minute, please?"

The words were so polite that for the first few seconds the boy was not alarmed. A lady was speaking, a lady like any other lady, unless it was that her manner was quieter, more forceful, more sure of itself, than he was accustomed to among women. But

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what he never forgot during all the rest of his life was the look on his mother's face. As he came to analyze it later it was one of inner surrender. She had come to the point which she had long foreseen as her objective. She had reached the end. But in spite of surrender, and though she grew bloodlessly pale, she was still determined to show fight.

"What do you want me for?"

"If you'll step this way I'll tell you."

"I don't know that I care to do that. I'm going home."

"You'd better come quietly. You won't gain anything by making a fuss."

A second lady, also forceful and sure of herself, having joined them they pushed their way back through the throng. At the glove counter a place was made for them. The saleswoman was beckoned to. The woman who had stopped them at the door continued to take the lead.

"Now, will you show us what you've got in your muff?"

She produced the mittens. "Yes, I have got these. I bought and paid for them."

The saleswoman gave her account of the incident. Women shoppers gathered round. Floorwalkers came up.

"It's a lie; it's a lie!" the boy heard his mother cry out, as the girl behind the counter told her tale. "If I didn't pay for them it was because I forgot. Here's the money. I'll pay for them now. What do you take me for?"

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“No; you won’t pay for them now. That’s not the way we do business. Just come along this way.”

“I’m not going nowheres else. If you won’t take the money you can go without it. Leave me alone, and let me take my little boy home.”

Her voice had the screaming helplessness of women in the grasp of forces without pity. A floorwalker laid his hand on her shoulder, compelling her to turn round.

“Don’t you touch me,” she shouted. “If I’ve got to go anywheres I can go without your tearing the clothes off my back, can’t I?”

For the little boy it was the last touch of humiliation. Rushing at the floorwalker, he kicked him in the shins.

“Don’t you hit my mudda. I won’t let you.”

A second floorwalker held the youngster back. Some of the crowd laughed. Others declared it a monstrous thing that women of the sort should have such fine-looking children.

Presently they were surging through the crowd again, toward a back region of the premises. The boy, not crying but panting as if spent by a long race, held his mother by the skirt; on the other side one of the forceful women had her by the arm. He saw that his mother’s hat had been knocked to one side, and that a mesh of her dark hair had broken loose. He remembered this picture, and how the shoppers, wherever they passed, made a lane for them, shocked by the sight of their disgrace.

They came to an office, where their party, his mother, himself, the two forceful women, and two

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floorwalkers, were shut in with an elderly man who sat behind a desk. It was still the first of the forceful women who took the lead.

"Mr. Corning, we've caught this woman shoplifting."

"I haven't been," the boy heard his mother deny. "Honest to God, I haven't been."

"We've been watching her for some time past," the forceful woman continued, "but we never managed before to get her with the goods."

The elderly man was gray, pale-eyed, and mild-mannered. He listened while the story was given him in detail.

"I'm afraid we must give you in charge," he said, gently, when the facts were in.

"No, don't do that, don't do that," she implored, tearfully. "I've got my little boy. He can't do without me."

"He hasn't done very well with you, has he?" the elderly man reasoned. "A woman who's taught a boy of that age to steal . . ."

He was interrupted by the coming in of a policeman, summoned by telephone. At sight of him the unhappy woman gave a loud inarticulate gasp of terror. All that for seven years she had dreaded seemed now about to come true. The boy felt terror too, but the knowledge that his mother needed him nerved him to be a man.

"Don't you be afraid, mudda. If they put you in jail I'll go to jail too. I won't let them take me away from you."

"You'd better come with me, missus," the police-

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man said, with gruff kindness, when the situation was explained to him. "The kid can come too. 'Twon't be so bad. Lots of these cases. You'll live through it all right, and it'll learn you to keep straight. One of these days you may be glad that it happened."

They went out through a dimly lighted passage-way, clogged with parcels and packing-cases which men were loading into drays. It was dark by this time, the streets being lighted as at night. The police-station was not far away, and to it they were led through a series of byways in which there were few foot-passengers. The policeman allowed them to walk in front of him, so that the connection was not too obvious. The boy held his mother's hand, which clutched at his with a nervous loosening and tightening of the fingers. As the situation was beyond words they made no attempt to speak.

"This way."

Within the police-station the officer turned them to the right, where they entered a small bare room. Brilliantly lighted with unshaded electrics, its glare was fierce upon the eyes. At a plain oak desk a man in uniform was seated with a ledger in front of him. Another man in uniform standing near the door picked his teeth to kill time.

"Shoplifting case," was the simple introduction of the party.

They stood before the man at the desk, who dipped his pen in the ink, and barely glanced at them. What to the boy and his mother was as the end of the world was to him all in the day's work.

"Name?"

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She gave her name distinctly, and less to the lad's surprise than if she hadn't often used pseudonyms.

"Mrs. Theodore Whitelaw."

"Address?"

She gave the address correctly.

"Boy's name?"

She spoke carefully, as one who had prepared her statements. "He's been known as Thomas Coburn. He's really Thomas Whitelaw. His father was my second husband."

"If he's your second husband's child why is he called by your first husband's name?"

She was prepared here too. "Because I'd given up using my second husband's name. I was unhappily married."

"Is he dead?"

"Yes, he is."

Never having heard before so much of his private history, the boy registered it all. It was exactly the sort of detail for which he had been eager. It explained too that name of Whitelaw, allusions to which had puzzled him. He was so engrossed by the fact that he was not Tom Coburn but Tom Whitelaw as hardly to listen while it was explained to his mother that she would spend the night in the Female House of Detention, and be brought before the magistrate in the morning. If the boy had no friends to whom to send him he would be well taken care of elsewhere.

The phlegm to which she had for a few minutes schooled herself broke down. "Oh, can't I keep him with me? He'll cry his eyes out without me."

She was given to understand that no child above

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the nursing age could be put in prison even for its mother's sake. From his reverie as to Tom Whitelaw he waked to what was passing.

"But I won't leave my mudda," he wailed, loudly. "I want to go to jail."

The kindly policeman put his arm about the boy's shoulder.

"You'll go to jail, sonny, when your time comes, if you set the right way to work. Your momma's only going to spend the night, and I'll see to it that you——"

In a side of the room a door opened noiselessly. A woman, wearing a uniform, with a bunch of keys hanging at her side, stood there like a Fate. She was a grave woman, strongly built, and with something inexorable in her eyes. Even the boy guessed who she was, throwing himself against her, and crying out, "Go 'way! go 'way! You won't take my mudda away from me."

But the folly of resistance became evident. The mother herself understood it so. Walking up to the woman with the keys, she said in an undertone:

"For God's sake get me out of this. I can't look on while he breaks his little heart. He's always been an angel."

That was all. She gave no backward look. Before the boy knew what was about to happen, she had passed into a corridor, and the door had closed behind her.

She was gone. He was left with these strange men. The need for being brave was not unknown to him. Not unknown to him was the power of calling

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to his aid a secret strength which had already carried him through tight places. He could only express it to himself in the words that he mustn't cry. Crying had come to stand for everything cowardly and babyish. He was so prone to do it that the struggle against it was the hardest he had to make. He struggled against it now; but he struggled vainly. He was all alone. Even the three policemen were talking together, while he stood deserted, and futile. His lips quivered in spite of himself. The tears gathered. Disgraced as he was anyhow, this weakness disgraced him more.

The room had an empty corner. Straight into it he walked, and turned his back, his face within the angle. The head with an old cap on it was bowed. The sturdy shoulders, muffled in a cheap top-coat, heaved up and down. But the legs in their knickerbockers were both straight and strong, and the feet firmly planted on the floor. Except for an occasional strangled sound which he couldn't control, he betrayed himself by nothing audible.

The three policemen, all of them fathers, glanced at him, but forbore to glance at one another. One of them tried to say, "Poor kid!" but the words stuck in his throat. It was the kindly fellow who had brought the lad and the woman there who recovered himself first.

"All right, then, boys. The Swindon Street Home. One of you can 'phone that we're on the way." He went over and laid his hand on the child's shoulder. "Say, sonny, I'm goin' to take you out to see the Christmas Tree."

The thought was a happy one. Tom Coburn had

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never seen any Christmas Trees, though he had often heard of them. He had specially heard of the community Christmas Tree which was new that year in that particular city. It was to be a splendid sight, and against the fascination of splendor even grief was not wholly proof. He looked shyly round, an incredible wonder in his tear-stained, upturned face.

In the street they walked hand in hand, pausing now and then to admire some brightly lighted window. The boy was in fairyland, but in spite of fairyland long deep sighs welled up from the springs of his loneliness and sorrow. To distract him the policeman took him into a druggist's and bought him a cone of ice-cream. The boy licked it gratefully, as they made their way to the open space consecrated to the Tree.

The night was brisk and frosty; the sky clear. In the streets there was movement, light, gayety. At a spot on a bit of pavement a vendor was showing a dancing toy, round which some scores of idlers were gathered. The dancing was so droll that the little boy laughed. The policeman bought him one.

When they came to the Christmas Tree the lad was in ecstasy. Nothing he had ever dreamed of equalled these fruits of many-colored fires. A band was playing, and suddenly the multitude broke into song.

O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem! 5

Even the policeman joined in, humming the refrain in Latin.

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Venite, adoremus;
Venite, adoremus;
Venite, adoremus,
Dominum.

Passing thus through marvels they came to the Swindon Street Home. The night-nurse, warned by telephone, was expecting them. She was a motherly woman who had once had a child, and knew well this precise situation.

“Oh, come in, you poor little boy! Have you had your supper?”

He hadn't had his supper, though the cone of ice-cream had stilled the worst pangs of hunger.

“Then you shall have some; and after that I'll put you in a nice comfy bed.”

“He's a fine kid,” the policeman commended, before going away, “and won't give you no trouble, will you, sonny?”

The boy caught him by the hand, looking up pleadingly into his face, as if he would have kept him. But the policeman had children of his own, and this was Christmas Eve.

“See you again, sonny,” he said, cheerily, as he went out, “and a merry Christmas!”

The night matron knew by experience all the sufferings of little boys homesick for mothers who have got into trouble. She had dealt with them by the hundred.

“Now, dear, while Mrs. Lamson is getting your supper we'll go to the washroom and you'll wash your face and hands. Then you'll feel more like eating, won't you?”

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Deprived of his policeman, despair would have settled on him again, had it not been for the night matron's hearty voice. The deeper his woe, and it was very deep, the less he could resist friendliness. Just as in that first agony, when he was only eight months old, he had turned to the only love available, so now he yielded again. He was not reconciled; he was not even comforted; he was only responsive and grateful, thus getting the strength to go on.

Going on was only in letting the night matron scrub his face and hands, and submitting patiently. As they went from the washroom to the dining room he held her by the hand. He did this first because he couldn't let her go, and then because the halls were big and bare and dark. Never had he been in any place so vast, or so impersonal. He was used to strangeness, as they moved so often, but not to strangeness on so immense a scale. It was a relief to him, because it brought in a note of hominess, to hear from an upper floor a forlorn little baby cry.

His supper toned him up. He could speak of his great sorrow. While the night matron sat with him and helped him to porridge he asked, suddenly:

"Will they let me go to jail and stay with my mudda to-morrow?"

"You see, dear, your mother may not be in jail to-morrow. Perhaps she'll be let out, and then you can go home with her."

"They didn't ought to put her in. I'm big. I could work for her, and then she wouldn't have to take things no more."

"But bless you, darling, you'll be able to work for

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her as it is. They won't keep her very long—not so very long—and I'll look after you till she comes out. After that . . .”

“What's your name?” he asked, solemnly, as if he wished to nail her to the bargain.

“Mrs. Crewdson's my name. I'm a widow. I like little boys. I like you especially. I think we're going to be friends.”

As a proof of this she took him to her own room, instead of to a dormitory, where she gave him a bath, found a clean night-shirt which, being too big, descended to his feet, and put him to sleep in a cot she kept on purpose for homeless little children in danger of being too lonely.

“You see, dear,” she explained to him, “I don't go to bed all night. I stay up to look after all the little children—there are a lot of them in this house—who may want something. So you needn't be afraid. I'll leave a light burning, and I'll be in and out all the time. If you wake up and hear a noise, you'll know that that'll be me going about in the rooms, but mostly I'll be in this room. Now, don't you want to say your prayers?”

He didn't want to say his prayers because he had never said any. She suggested, therefore, that he should kneel on the bed, put his hands together, and repeat the words she told him to say, as she sat on the edge of the cot.

“Dear God”—“Dear God”—“take care of me to-night”—“take care of me to-night”—“and take care of my dear mother”—“and take care of my dear

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mudda"—"and make us happy again"—"and make us happy again"—"for Jesus Christ's sake"—"for Jesus Christ's sake"—"Amen"—"Amen."

"God's up in the sky, isn't He?" he asked, as he hugged his dancing toy to him and let her cover him up.

"God's everywhere where there's love, it seems to me, dear. I bring a little bit of God to you, and you bring a little bit of God to me; and so we have Him right here. That's a good thought to go to sleep on, isn't it? So good-night, dear."

She kissed him as she supposed his mother would have done. He threw his arms about her neck, drawing her face close to his. "Good night, dear," he whispered back, and almost before she rose from the bedside she knew he was asleep.

Somewhere toward morning she came into the room and found him sitting up in his cot.

"Will it soon be daytime, Mrs. Crewdson?"

"Yes, dear; not so very long now."

"And when daytime comes could I go to the jail?"

"Not too early, dear. They wouldn't let you in."

"Oh, but I don't want to go in. I only want to stand outside. Then if my mudda looks out of the window, she'll see her little boy."

Throwing herself on her knees, she clasped him in her arms. "Oh, you darling! How I wish God had given me a little son like you! I did have one—he would have been just your age—only I—I lost him."

Touched by this tribute to himself, as well as by his friend's bereavement, he brought out a fine manly

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phrase he had long been saving for an adequate occasion.

“The hell you did, Mrs. Crewdson!”

Having thus expressed his sympathy, he nestled down to sleep again, hugging his dancing toy.

VII

HE woke to his first Christmas. That is, he woke to find a chair drawn up beside his cot and stocked with little presents. He had never had presents before. It had not been his mother's custom to make them. Since she gave him what she could afford, and they shared everything in common, presents would have seemed to her superfluous.

But here were half a dozen parcels done up in white paper and tied with red ribbon, and on them he could read his name. At least, he could read Tom, while he guessed from the length of the word and initial *W* that the other name was Whitelaw. So he was to be Tom Whitelaw now! The fact seemed to make a change in his identity. He stowed it away in the back of his mind for later meditation, in order to feast his soul on the mystic bounty of Santa Claus.

He knew who Santa Claus was. He had often seen him in the windows of the big stores, surrounded by tempting packages, and driving reindeer harnessed to a sleigh. He knew that he drove over the roofs of houses, down chimneys, and out through grates. Somewhere, too, he harbored the suspicion that this was only childish talk, and that the real Santa Claus must be a father or a mother, or in this case Mrs. Crewdson; only both childish talk and fact simmered without conflict in his brain. It was easier to think

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that a supernatural good-will had brought him this profusion than that commonplace hands, which had never done much for him hitherto, should all of a sudden be busy on his behalf.

Raising himself on his elbow, his first thought came with the bubbling of a sob. "My mudda is in jail!" His second was in the nature of a corollary, "But she'll like it when I tell her that Santa Claus took care of her little boy." The deduction gave him permission to enjoy himself.

At first he only gazed in a rapture that hardly guessed at what was beneath these snowy coverings. What he was to get was secondary to the fact that he was getting something. For the first time in his life he was taken into that vast family of boys and girls for whom Christmas has significance. Up to this morning he had stood outside of it wistfully—yearning, hoping, and yet condemned to stand aloof. Now, if his mudda hadn't been in jail . . .

The parcels were larger and smaller. Beginning with the smallest, he arranged them according to size. Merely to touch them sent a thrill through his frame. The smallest was round like an orange and yet yielded to pressure. He was almost sure it was a rubber ball. He could have been quite sure, only that he preferred the condition of suspense.

It was long before he could bring himself to untie the first red ribbon bow, his surprise on finding a rubber ball being no less keen than if he hadn't known it was a rubber ball on first taking it between his fingers. A handkerchief laid out flat, making the second parcel seem bigger than it was, sent him up in

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the scale of social promotion. By way of candies, nuts, a toothbrush with tooth paste, he came to the largest of all, a History of Mankind, written in words of one syllable, and garnished with highly-colored pictures of various racial types. If only his mother hadn't been in jail . . .

That his mother was no longer in jail was a fact he learned later in the day. It was a day of extremes, of quick rushes of rapture out of which he would fall suddenly, to go away somewhere and moan. When he begged, as he begged every hour or two, to be taken to the jail, he could be distracted by romplings with the other children, most of them in some such case as his own, or by some novelty in the life. To eat turkey and plum pudding at the head of one of three long tables, each seating twelve or fourteen, was to be raised to a point of social eminence beyond which it seemed there could be nothing more to reach. But in the midst of this pride the hard facts would recur to him, and turkey and plum pudding choke him.

That something had happened he began to infer when his beloved policeman appeared at the home in the afternoon. Having seen him enter, the boy ran up to him.

"Oh, mister, are you going to take me to the jail?"

Mister patted him on the head, though he answered, absently, "Not just now, sonny. You know you're goin' to have a Christmas Tree. I've come to see Miss Honiton."

Miss Honiton, one of the day matrons, having appeared at the end of the hall, the policeman turned him about by the shoulders.

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“Now be off with you and play. This has got to be private.”

He took himself off but only to the end of the hall, where they didn't notice that he lingered. He lingered because he knew that, whatever the mystery, it had something to do with him.

He caught, however, no more than words which he couldn't understand. Cyanide of potassium! Only his quick ear and retentive memory enabled him to lay hold of syllables so difficult. His mother had taken something or hadn't taken something, he couldn't make out which. All he saw was that both of his friends looked grave, Miss Honiton summing up their consultation,

“I'll let him enjoy the Christmas Tree before saying anything about it.”

The policeman answered, regretfully: “Do you think you must?”

“I know I must. He ought to be told. He has a right to know. He might resent it later if we didn't tell him now.”

“Very well, sister. I leave it to you.”

The door having closed on this friend, Tom White-law, so to call him henceforth, made his way into the room where the Christmas Tree was presently to be lighted up. But he had no heart for the spectacle. There was something new. In the grip of the forces which controlled his life he felt helpless, small. Even his companions in misfortune, as all these children were, could be relatively light-hearted. They could clap their hands when the Tree began to burn with magic fires, and take pleasure in the presents handed

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out to them. He could not. He was waiting for something to be told to him—something he had a right to know.

One by one, the presents were cut from the Tree; one by one the children went up to receive this addition to what Santa Claus had brought them in the morning. His own name was among the last. When it was called he went forward perfunctorily at first, and then with a sudden inspiration.

His package was handed him, not by one of the matrons but by a beaming young lady from outside. As she bent to deliver it he had his question ready.

“Please, miss, what’s cyanide of potassium?”

He had repeated the words to himself so often during the half hour since first hearing them that he pronounced them distinctly. The young lady laughed.

“Why, I think it’s a deadly poison.” She turned to the matron nearest her. “What is cyanide of potassium? This dear little boy wants to know.”

But the dear little boy had already walked soberly back to his seat. While the other children made merry with their presents he sat with his on his lap, and reflected. Poison was something that killed people. He knew that. In one of the houses where they had lived a woman had taken poison, and two days later he had seen her carried out in a long black box. The impression had remained with him poignantly.

He had no inclination to cry. Tears could bring little relief in this kind of cosmic catastrophe. If his mother had taken poison and was to be carried out in a long black box, everything that had made up his world would have collapsed. He could only wait sub-

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missively till the thing he ought to know was told to him.

It was told when the giving of the presents was over, and the children flocked out of the room to get ready for their Christmas supper. Miss Honiton was waiting near the door.

“Come into my office, dear. I want to ask you a few questions.”

Miss Honiton's office was a mixture of office and sitting room, in that it had business furniture offset by photographs and knickknacks. Sitting at her desk, she turned to the lad, who stood as if to attention, a long thin sympathetic face, stamped with practical acumen.

“I wanted to ask you if besides your mother you have any relations.”

His dark blue eyes, deep set beneath his bushy brows, she thought the most serious and earnest she had ever seen in any of the hundreds of homeless little boys she had had to deal with.

“No, miss.”

“No brothers or sisters, no uncles or aunts?”

“No, miss.”

“Didn't your mother ever take you to see anyone?”

“No, miss.”

“Well, then, didn't anyone ever come to see her?”

“No, miss.”

To the point she was trying to reach she went round by another way. Where did they live? How long had they lived there? Where had they lived before that? How long had they lived in that place? He answered to the best of his recollection, but when

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it came to their flittings from tenement to tenement, and from town to town, his recollection didn't take him very far. Miss Honiton soon understood that she might as well question a bird as to its migrations.

For a minute she said nothing, turning over in her mind the various ways of breaking her painful news, when he himself asked, suddenly:

"Is my mudda dead?"

The question was so direct that she felt it deserved a direct answer.

"Yes, dear."

"Did she"—he pulled himself together for the big words—"did she take cyanide of potassium?"

"Yes, dear; so I understand."

"Will they take her away in a long black box?"

"She'll be buried, dear, of course. There'll have to be a funeral somewhere."

"Can I go to it?"

"Yes, dear, certainly. I'll go with you myself."

He said nothing more, and Miss Honiton felt the futility of trying to comfort him. There was no opening for comfort in that stony little face. All she could suggest to break the tension was to ask if he wouldn't like his supper.

He went to his supper and ate it. He ate it ruminantly, speechlessly. What had happened to him he could not measure; what was before him he could not probe. All he knew of himself was that he had become a clod of misery, with almost nothing to temper his desolation.

Two big tears rolled down his cheeks without his

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being aware of it. They did not, however, escape the eyes of a little girl who sat near him.

“Who’s a cry-baby?” she shrieked, to the entertainment of the lookers-on. She pointed at him with her spoon. “A grea’ big boy like that cryin’ for his momma!”

He accepted the scorn as a tonic. “A grea’ big boy like that cryin’ for his momma,” were the words with which he kept many a pang during the next few days from being more than a tearless anguish.

Miss Honiton was as good as her word as to going with him to the rooms which housed the long black box. This he understood to be all that now represented his mudda. She had tried to explain the place as an “undertaker’s parlor,” but the words were outside his vocabulary. In the same way the why and the wherefore of the ceremony were outside his intelligence. He and Miss Honiton went into the dim room, and stood near the thing he heard mentioned as “the body.” After some mumbled reading they went out again, and back to the Swindon Street Home.

Back in the Swindon Street Home he was still without a wherefore or a why. He got up, he washed, he dressed, he ate, he went to bed again. He was in a dormitory now with three other little boys, all of them too deep in the problems of parents in jail or in parts unknown to offer him much fellowship. They cried when they were left alone in bed, or they cried in their sleep; but they cried. It was his own pride, and in no small measure his strength, that he didn’t cry, unless he cried in dreams.

Everyone was good to him, Mrs. Crewdson and

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Miss Honiton especially, but no one could give him the clue to life which instinctively he clutched for. That one didn't stay forever in the Swindon Street Home he could see from observation. The children he had found there went away; other children came. Some of these stayed but a night or two. None of them stayed much longer. By those sixth and seventh senses which children develop when they are in trouble he divined that conferences were taking place on his behalf. Now and then he detected glances shot toward him by the matrons in discussion which told him that he was being talked about. It was easy to deduce that he was in the Swindon Street Home longer than was the custom because they didn't know what to do with him. He inferred that they didn't know what to do with him from the many questions which many people asked. Sometimes it was a man, more times it was a woman, but the questions were always along the lines of those of Miss Honiton as he came out from the children's Christmas Tree. Had he any relatives? Had he any friends? If he had they ought to look after him. It was hard for these kindly people to believe that he had no claim whatever on any member of the human race.

He began to hear the words, a State ward. Though they meant nothing to him at first, he strove, as he always did, with new words and expressions, to find their application. Then one evening, as Mrs. Crewdson was putting him to bed, she told him that that was what he had become.

"You see, darling, now that your father and mother are both dead, the whole country is going to adopt

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you. Isn't that nice? And it isn't everything. You're going to have a home—not a home like this—what we call an institution—but a real home—with a real father and mother in it, and real brothers and sisters.”

He took this stolidly. He was not to be moved now by anything that could happen. A waif on the world, the world had the right to pitch him in any direction that it chose. All he could do with his own desires was to beat them into submission. He mustn't cry! His fears and his griefs alike focussed themselves into that resolve. It was the only way in which he could translate his stout-hearted will to endure.

VIII

TO conduct him to his new home, Mrs. Crewdson gave up the whole of the morning she was supposed to spend in sleep after her all-night vigil. The home was in a little town a short distance up the Hudson. Though the railway journey was not long, it was the longest he had ever taken, and, once the river came within view, it was not without its excitements. His spirits began to rise with a sense of new adventure. There were things to look at, bridges, steamers, a man-o'-war at anchor, lumber yards, coal sheds, an open-air exhibit of mortuary monuments, and high overhead the clear cold blue of a January sky. On the other side of the river the wooded heights made a bold brown bastion, flecked here and there with snow.

As he had not asked where they were going, or the composition of the family with whom the Guardian of State Wards was placing him, his protectress permitted him to make his own discoveries. New faces, new contacts, new necessities, would help him to forget the old.

They got out at the station of Harfrey. Mrs. Crewdson carried the suitcase containing the wardrobe rescued when they had searched the rooms which he and his mother had occupied last. In front of the station they got on a ramshackle street car, which zigzagged up the face of the bank, rising steeply

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from the river, so reaching the little town. They turned sharply at the top of the ridge to run through the one long street. It was a mean-looking street of drab wooden dwellings and drab wooden shops, occupied mostly by people dependent on the grand seigneurs of the neighboring big "places." An ugly schoolhouse, an ugly engine house, two or three ugly churches, further defied that beauty of which God had been so generous.

Having got out at a corner at which the car stopped, they walked to a small wooden house with a mansard roof, standing back from the street. It was a putty-colored house, with window and door frames in flecked, anæmic yellow. Perched on the edge of the ridge, it had three stories at the back and but two in front. What had once been an orchard had dwindled now to three or four apple trees, the rest of the ground being utilized as a chicken run. As the day was sunny, a few Plymouth Rocks were scratching and pecking in the yard.

Having turned in here, they found themselves expected, the front door opening before they reached the cement slab in front of it. The greetings were all for Mrs. Crewdson, who was plainly an old friend. The boy went in only because Mrs. Crewdson went in, and in the same way proceeded to a cheery, shabby sitting room. Here there were books and magazines about, while a canary in a cage began to sing as soon as he heard voices. To a homeless little boy the haven was so sweet that he forgot to take off his cap.

The first few minutes were consumed in questions as to this one and that one, relatives apparently, to-

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gether with data given and received as to certain recognized maladies. Mrs. Crewdson was getting better of her headaches, but Mrs. Tollivant still suffered from her varicose veins. Only when these preliminaries were out of the way and Mrs. Crewdson had thrown off her outer wraps, was the introduction accomplished.

"So I've brought you the boy! Tom, dear, this is Mrs. Tollivant who's going to take care of you. Your cap, Tom! I imagine," she continued, with an apologetic smile, "you'll find manners very rudimentary."

Obliged to take an early train back to New York, Mrs. Crewdson talked with veiled, confidential frankness. A boy of seven could not be supposed to seize the drift of her cautious phraseology, even if he heard some of it.

"So you know the main features of the case. . . . I told them it wouldn't be fair to you to let you assume so much responsibility without your knowing the whole. . . . With children of your own to think of, you couldn't expose them to a harmful influence unless you were put in a position to take every precaution against . . . Not that we've seen anything ourselves. . . . But, of course, after such a bringing up there can't but be traces. . . . And such good material there. . . . I'm sure you'll find it so. . . . Personally, I haven't seen a human being in a long time to whom my heart has gone . . . Only there it is. . . . An inheritance which can't but be . . ."

He didn't feel betrayed. He had nothing to resent. Mrs. Crewdson had proved herself his friend, and he trusted her. Without knowing all the words she used,

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he caught easily enough the nature of the sentiments they stood for. These he accepted meekly. He was a bad boy. His mother and he had been engaged in wicked practices. Dimly, in unallayed mental discomfort, he had been convinced of this himself; and now it was clear to everyone. If they hadn't known what to do with him it was because a bad boy couldn't fit rightly into a world where everyone else was good. A young evildoer, he had no rôle left but that of humility.

He was the more keenly aware of this after Mrs. Crewdson had bidden him farewell, and he was face to face with his new foster mother. A wiry little woman, quick in action and sharp in tongue, she would be kind to him, with a nervous, nagging kindness. He got this impression, as he got an odor or a taste, without having to define or analyze. Later in life, when he had come to observe something of the stamp which professions leave on personalities, he was not surprised that she should have worn herself out in school-teaching before marrying Andrew Tollivant, a book-keeper. As he sat now, just as Mrs. Crewdson had left him, his overcoat still on his back, his cap in his hand, his feet dangling because the chair was too high for him, she treated him as if he were a class.

“Now, little boy, before we go any farther, you and I had better understand each other.”

With this brisk call to his attention, she sat down in front of him, frightening him to begin with.

“You know that this is now to be your home, and I intend to do my duty by you to the best of my ability. Mr. Tollivant will do the same. If you take the chil-

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dren in the right way I'm sure you'll find them friendly. They were very nice to the last little boy the Board of Guardians sent to us."

Staring in fascinated awe at the starry brightness of her eyes, and the wrinkles of worry around them, he waited in silence for more.

"But one or two things I hope you'll remember on your side. Perhaps you haven't heard that the Board has found it hard to get anyone to take you. You're old enough to know that where there are children in a family people are shy of a boy who's had just your history. But I've run the risk. It's a great risk, I admit, and may be dangerous to my own. Do you understand what I mean?"

"No, ma'am," he said, blankly.

"Then I'll tell you. There are two things children must learn as soon as they're able to learn anything. One is to be honest; the other is to tell the truth. You know what telling the truth is, don't you?"

He did know, but paralyzed by her earnestness, he denied the fact. "No, ma'am."

"So there you are! And I don't suppose you've been taught anything about honesty."

"No, ma'am."

"Then you must begin to learn."

He began to learn that minute. Still treating him as a child, she delivered a little lecture, such as a child of tender years could understand, on the two basic virtues of which he had pleaded ignorance. He listened as in a trance, his eyes fixed on her vacantly. Though seizing a disconnected word or two, fear kept

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him from getting the gist of it all, as he generally did.

“It’s your influence on the children that I want you to beware of. Arthur is older than you, but he’s only ten; and a boy with your experience could easily teach him a good deal of harm. Cilly is eight, and Bertie only five. You’ll be careful with them, won’t you? Do you know that if we lead others astray God will call us to account for it?”

“No, ma’am.”

“Well, He will; and I want you to remember it, and be afraid. Unless you’re afraid of God you’ll never grow into the good boy I hope we’re going to make of you.”

The homily finished, he was instructed in the ways of the upper floor, where, in the sloping space under the eaves, he was to have his room. After this he came back to the sitting room, not knowing what else to do. He was in a daze. It was as if he had dropped on another planet where nothing was familiar. Whether to stand up or sit down he didn’t know. He didn’t know what to think, or what to think about. Cut loose from his bearings, he floated in mental space.

As standing seemed to commit him to least that was wrong, he stood. Standing implied looking out of the window, and looking out of the window showed him, about half past twelve, a well-built boy, rosy with the cold, noisy from exuberance of spirit, swinging in at the gate and brandishing a hockey stick. From her preparation of the dinner his mother ran to meet

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him at the door. She spoke in a loud whisper that easily reached the sitting room.

"Now be careful, Arthur. He's come. He's in there."

Arthur responded with noisy indifference. "Who? The crook?"

"Sh-h-h, dear! You mustn't call him that. We must help him to forget it, and to grow into being like ourselves."

Arthur grunted noncommittally. Presently he strolled into the sitting room, whistling a tune. With hands in his pockets, his bearing was that of an overlord. He made a circuit of the room, eyeing the new guest, as the new guest eyed him back.

"Hello?" the overlord said at last, with a faint note of interrogation.

Still whistling and still with his hands in his pockets, he strolled out again.

Tom Whitelaw's nerves had become so many run-lets for shame. He was the crook! He knew the word as one which crooks themselves use contemptuously. If he should hear it again . . . But happily Mrs. Tollivant had put her veto on its use.

The gate clicked again. Coming up the pathway, he saw a girl of about his own age, with a boy much younger who swung himself on crutches. All his movements were twisted and grotesque. His head was sunk into his shoulders as if he had no neck. His feet and legs wore metal braces. His face had the uncannily aged look produced by suffering. Without actually helping him, the little girl kept by his side maternally. She was a dainty little girl, very

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fair, with shiny yellow hair hanging down her back, like a fairy princess in a picture book. The boy looking out of the window fell in love with her at sight. He was sure that in her he would find a friend.

On entering she called out in a whiny voice, very musical to Tom Whitelaw's ear:

"Ma! Bertie's been a naughty boy. He wouldn't sing 'Pretty Birdling' for Miss Smallbones. I told him you'd punish him, and you will, won't you, ma?"

As there was no response to this, the young ones came to the door of the sitting room and looked in. They stared at the stranger, and the stranger stared at them, with the unabashed frankness of young animals. Having stared their fill, the son and daughter of the house went off to ask about dinner.

To Tom that dinner was another new experience. For the first time in his life he sat down to what is known as a family meal. Attempts had sometimes been made by well-meaning women in the tenements to rope him to their tables, but his mother had never permitted him to yield to them. Now he sat down with those of his own age, to be served like them, and on some sort of footing of equality. The honor was so great that he could hardly swallow. Second helpings were beyond him.

The afternoon was blank again. "You'll begin to go to school on Monday," Mrs. Tollivant had explained; but in the meantime he had the hours to himself. They were long. He was lonely. Having been given permission to go into the yard, he stood studying the Plymouth Rocks. Presently he was

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conscious of a light step behind him. Before he had time to turn around he also heard a voice. It was a whiny voice, yet sharp and peremptory.

“You stop looking at our hens.”

The fairy princess had not come up to him; she had paused some two or three yards away. Her expression was so haughty that it hurt him. It hurt him more from her than from anybody else because of his admiration. He looked at her beseechingly, not for permission to go on studying the Plymouth Rocks, but for some shade of relenting. He got none. The sharp little face was as glittering and cold as one of the icicles hanging from the roof behind her. Heavy at heart, he turned to go into the house by the back door.

He had climbed most of the hill when the clear, whiny voice arrested him.

“Who’s a crook?”

At this stab in the back he leaped round, fury in his dark blue eyes. But the fairy princess was used to fury in dark blue eyes, and knew how best to defy it. The tip of the tongue she thrust out at him added insolence to insult. He turned again, and, wounded in all his being, went on into the house.

Near the back door there was a sun parlor, and in it he saw Bertie, squatting in a small-wheeled chair built for his convenience. Bertie called to him invitingly.

“I’ve got a book.”

“I’ve got a book, too,” he returned, in Bertie’s own spirit.

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“You show me your book, and I’ll show you mine.”

The proposal being fair, he went in search of his History of Mankind. In a few minutes he was seated on the floor beside Bertie’s chair, exchanging literary criticisms. He liked Bertie. He had a premonition that Bertie was going to like him. After the disdain of the fairy princess, and the superciliousness of the overlord, this was comforting. Moreover, he could return Bertie’s friendliness by doing things for him which no one else had time to do. He could push his wheeled chair; he could run his errands; he could fetch and carry; he would like doing it.

“I’ve got infantile paralysis.”

“I’ve got a rubber ball.”

“I’ve got a train.”

“I’ve got a funny little man what dances.”

Coming into the house, Cilly found them the best of friends, in the best of spirits. Without entering the sun-parlor, she spoke through the doorway, coldly.

“Bertie, I don’t think momma would like you to act like that. I’ll go and ask her.”

Mrs. Tollivant hurried from the kitchen, scouring a saucepan as she looked in on them. Seeing nothing amiss, she went away again. Then as if distrusting her own vision, she came back. She came back more than once, anxiously, suspiciously. Bertie was enjoying himself with this boy picked out of the gutter. That the boy had been picked out of the gutter was not what troubled her, but that Bertie should enjoy himself in the lad’s society. Wise enough not to put

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notions into Bertie's head, she stopped her ward later in the day, when she had the chance to speak to him alone.

"I saw you playing with Bertie. Well, that's all right. Only you'll remember your promise, won't you? You won't teach him anything harmful?"

"No, ma'am," the boy answered, humbly, as one who has a large selection of harmful things to impart.

IX

HE had looked forward to Monday and school. After four days in the Tollivant household he was eager for relief from it. Except for Cilly's occasional, and always private, taunts, they were not unkind to him; they only treated him as an outcast whom they had been obliged to succor because no one else would do so. He had the same food and drink as they; his room was good enough; of whatever was material he had no complaint to make. There was only the distrust which rendered his bread bitter and the bed hard to lie upon. They didn't take him in as one of them. They kept him outside, an alien, an intruder.

It was again a new experience in that for the first time in his life he was doing without love. When he was Tom Coburn he had had plenty of it at the worst of times. The Swindon Street Home was full of it. In the Tollivant house it was the only thing weighed and measured and stinted. He couldn't, of course, make this analysis. He only knew that something on which his life depended was not given him.

He hoped to find it in the school. In any case the school would admit him to the larger life. It would bind him to that human family which he had so long craved to enter. In addition to that, it was at school you learned things.

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He was the more eager to learn things for the reason that Mrs. Tollivant had declared him backward. In the primary school Cilly was in the second grade; he must go into the first. He would be with children a year younger than himself. But the humiliation would be an incentive to ambition. He had already decided that only by "knowing things" should he be able to lift himself out of his despised estate.

The school session was all he had hoped for. Miss Pollard, the teacher, put in touch with his story by Mrs. Tollivant, kept him near to her, and watched over him. He learned to discriminate between *his*, *has*, and *had*, as matters of orthography, as well as between *cat*, *car*, and *can*. That twice two made four and twice four made eight added much to his understanding of numbers. He sang *Roving the Old Homeland*, while Miss Pollard pointed on the map to the places as they were named.

From Plymouth town to Plymouth town
The Pilgrims made their way;
The Puritans settled Salem,
And Boston on the Bay.

The air had a rhythm and a lilt which allowed for the inclusion of any reasonable number of redundant syllables.

The Dutch lived in New Amsterdam,
Where the blue waters fork;
The English came and conquered it,
And turned it into New York.

A little history, a little geography, being taught by the simple method of doggerel, much pleasure was

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evoked by the exercise of healthy lungs. Listening to her new pupil, Miss Pollard discovered a sweet treble that had never before been aware of itself, with a linnet's joy in piping. A linnet's joy was his joy throughout the whole morning, with no more than a slight flaw in his ecstasy in the thought of two hours in the Tollivant home before he came back for the afternoon.

As Cilly called for Bertie at the kindergarten, he walked homeward by himself. Happy with a happiness never experienced before, he had not noticed that his schoolmates hung away from him, tittering as he passed. To well-dressed little boys and girls his worn old cap, his frayed knickerbockers, and above all his cheap gray overcoat with a stringy sheepskin collar, naturally marked him for derision. They would have marked him for derision even had his story not been known to everyone.

He went singing on his way, stepping manfully to the measure.

The Dutch lived in New Amsterdam,
Where the blue waters fork;
The English came and conquered it,
And turned it into New York.

They massed themselves behind him, convulsed by his lack of self-consciousness. The little girls giggled; the boys attempted to make snowballs from snow too powdery to hold together. One lad found a frozen potato which he hurled in such a way as to skim close to the singing figure while just missing it. Tom Whitelaw, unsuspecting of ill-will, turned round in

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curiosity. He was greeted by a hoot from the crowd, but from whom he couldn't tell.

"Who's the boy what his mother was put in jail?"

The hoot became a chorus of jeers. By one after another the insult was taken up.

"Who's the boy what his mother was put in jaaa-il?"

As far as he was able to distinguish, the voices of the little girls were the louder. In their merriment they screamed piercingly.

"Gutter-snipe! Gutter-rat! Crook! Crook! Crook! Who's the boy what his mother was put in ja-aa-ail?"

Crimson, with clenched fists, with gnashing teeth, with tears of rage in his eyes, he stood his ground while they came on. They swept toward him in a semicircle of which he made the center. Very well! So much the better! He could spring on at least one of them, and dash his brains out on the ground. There was no ferocity he would not enjoy putting into execution.

He sprang, but amid the yells of the crowd his prey dodged and escaped him. The semicircle broke. Instead of advancing in massed formation, it danced round him now as forty or fifty imps. The imps bewildered him, as *banderilleros* bewilder a bull in the ring. He didn't know which to attack. When he lunged at one, the charge was diverted by another, so that he struck at the air wildly. Shrieks of mockery at these failures maddened him, with the heart-breaking madness of a loving thing goaded out of all semblance to itself. He panted, he groaned, he dashed about foolishly, he stumbled, he fell. When pelted

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with pebbles or scraps of ice, he was hardly aware of the rain upon his head.

But the mob swept on, leaving him behind. At gates and corners the boy baiters disappeared, hungry for their dinners. Most of them forgot him as soon as they had turned their backs. It was easy for them to stop for awhile since they could begin again.

He was alone on the gritty, icy slope surrounding the schoolhouse. There was no comfort for him in the world. Faintly he remembered as a satisfaction that he hadn't cried, but even this consolation was cold. He wondered if he couldn't kill himself.

He did not kill himself, though he pondered ways and means of doing it. He came to the conclusion that it would be foolish to kill himself before killing some of his tormentors. He prayed about it that night, his first prayer, except for the one taught him on Christmas Eve by Mrs. Crewdson.

To the family devotions, for which all were assembled about eight o'clock, before the younger children went to bed, Mr. Tollivant had begun to add a new petition.

"And, O Heavenly Father, take pity on the little stranger within our gates, even as we have welcomed him into our home. Blot out his past from Thy book. Give him a new heart. Make him truthful and honest especially. Help him to be gentle, obedient . . ."

But savagely the boy intervened on his own behalf. "O Heavenly Father, don't! Don't give me a new heart, or make me gentle and obedient, till I kill some of them fellows that called me a crook, for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen."

X

HE killed none of the fellows who called him a crook, though during the first two years of his schooling he was called a crook pretty often. Whatever grade he was in, he was always that boy who differs from other boys, and is therefore the black swan in a flock of white ones. Whatever his progress, he made it to the tune of his own history. He was a gutter-snipe. His mother had killed herself in jail! Before she had killed herself both he and she had been arrested for thieving in a shop! There was not a house in Harfrey where the tale was not told. There was never a boy or girl in the school who hadn't learned it before making his acquaintance.

Besides, they said of him, he would have been "different" anyhow. Being "different" was an offense less easily pardoned than being criminal. Dressed more poorly than they, and with no claims of a social kind, he carried himself with that bearing which they could only describe as putting on airs. It was Cilly Tollivant who first brought this charge home to him.

"But I don't, Cilly," he protested, earnestly. "I don't know how to be any other way."

Cilly was by this time growing sisterly. She couldn't live in the house with him and not feel her heart relenting, and though she disdained him in public, as her own interests compelled her to do, in private she tried to help him.

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"Don't know how to be any other way!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "Tom Whitelaw, you make me sick. Don't you know even how to *talk* right?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"There you go," she interrupted, bitterly. "Why can't you say *Yep*, like anybody else?"

He took the suggestion humbly. He would try. His only explanation of his eccentricity was that *Yep* and *Nope* didn't suit his tongue.

But adopting *Yep* and *Nope*, as he might have adopted words from a foreign language, adopting much else that was crude and crass and vulgar and noisy and swaggering and standardized, according to schoolboy notions of the standard, he still found himself "different." For one thing, he looked different. Debase his language as he might, or coarsen his manners, or stultify his impulses, he couldn't keep himself from shooting up tall and straight, with a carriage of the head which was in itself an offense to those who knew themselves inferior. It made nothing easier for him that his teachers liked and respected him. "Teacher's pet" was a term of reproach hardly less painful than crook or gutter-snipe. But he couldn't help learning easily; he couldn't help answering politely when politely spoken to; he couldn't help the rapture of his smile when a friendly word came his way. All this told against him. He was guyed, teased, worried, tortured. If there was a cap to be snatched it was his. If there was one of a pair of rubber shoes to be stolen or hidden it was his. If there was an exercise book to be grabbed and thrown up into a tree where the owner could be pelted while

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he clambered after it, it was his. Because he was poor, friendless, defenseless, and yet with damnable pride written all over him, it became a recognized law of the school that any meanness done to him would be legitimate.

But in his third year at the Tollivants the persecution waned, and in the fourth it stopped. His schoolmates grew. Growing, they developed other instincts. Fair play was one of them; admiration for pluck was another.

"You've got to hand it to that kid," Arthur Tollivant, now fourteen, had been heard to say in a circle of his friends. "He's stood everything and never squealed a yelp. Some young tough, believe me!"

This good opinion was reflected among the lads of Tom Whitelaw's own age. They had never been cruel; they had only been primitive. Having passed beyond that stage, they forgot to no small degree what they had done while in it. The boy who at seven was the crook was at eleven Whitey the Sprinter. He walked to and from school with the best of them. With the best of them he played and fought and swore privately. If he put on airs it was the airs of being a much sadder dog than he was, daring to smoke a cigarette and go home with the smell of the wickedness on his breath.

So, outwardly, Tom Whitelaw came in for two full years of good-natured toleration. If it did not go further than toleration it was because he was a State ward. On the baseball or the football team he might be welcomed as an equal; in homes there was discrimination. He was not invited to parties, and

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among the young people of Harfrey parties were not few. Girls who met him at the Tollivants' didn't speak to him outside. When Cilly, now being known as Cecilia, had her friends to celebrate her birthday, he remained in his room with no protest from the family at not joining them. None the less, it was a relief to be free from jeering in the streets, as well as from being reminded every day at school of his mother's tragedy. It was a relief to him; but it was no more.

For more than that the wound had gone too deep. Outwardly, he accepted their approaches; in his heart he rejected them, biding his time. He was biding his time, not with longings for revenge—he was too sensible now for that—but in the hope of passing on and forgetting them. By the time he was twelve he was already aware of his impulse toward growth.

It was in his soul as a secret conviction, the seed's knowledge of its own capacity to germinate. Most of the boys and girls around him he could judge, not by a precocious worldly wisdom, but by his gift for intuitive sizing up. Their range was so far and no farther, and they themselves were aware of it. They would become clerks and plumbers and carpenters and school-teachers and shoe dealers and provision men, and whatever else could reach its fulfillment in a small country town. He himself felt no limit. Life was big. He knew he could expand in it. To nurse resentments would be small, and would keep him small. All he asked was to forget them, to forget, too, those who called them forth; but to that end he must be far away.

XI

THE road to this Far-away began in the summer vacation of the year when he was supposed to be twelve. It was the year when he first went to work, though the work was meant to last for no more than a few weeks.

Mr. Quidmore, a market gardener at Bere, in Connecticut, some seven or eight miles eastward toward the Sound, had come over to ask Mr. Tollivant for a few hours' work in straightening out his accounts. Straightening out accounts for men who were but amateurs at bookkeeping was a means by which Mr. Tollivant eked out his none-too-generous salary.

It was a Sunday afternoon in June. They were in the yard, looking at the Plymouth Rocks behind their defenses of chicken-wire. That is, Mr. Quidmore was looking at the Plymouth Rocks, but Tom was looking at Mr. Quidmore. Mr. and Mrs. Tollivant were giving their guest information as to how they raised their hens and marketed their eggs.

It was a family affair. Mrs. Tollivant prepared the food; Cecilia fed the birds; Art hunted for the eggs; Bertie and Tom packed them. Mr. Quidmore was moved to say:

"I wish I had a fine boy like your Art to help me with the berrypicking. Good money in it. Three a week and his keep for as long as the strawberries hold out."

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Tom saw Mrs. Tollivant shake her head at her husband behind Mr. Quidmore's back. This meant disapproval. Disapproval could not be disapproval of the work, but of Mr. Quidmore. Art already gave his holiday services to a dairy for a dollar less than Mr. Quidmore's offer, and no keep. It was the employer, then, and not the employment that Mrs. Tollivant distrusted.

And yet Mr. Quidmore fascinated Tom. He had never before seen anyone whose joints had the looseness of one of those toys which you worked with a string. He was so slim, too, that you got little or no impression of a body beneath his flapping clothes. Nervously restless, he walked with a shuffle of which the object seemed the keeping of his shoes from falling off. When he talked or laughed one side of his long thin face was screwed up as if by some early injury or paralysis. The right portion of his lips could smile, while the left trembled into a rictus. This made his speech slower and more drawling than Tom was accustomed to hear; but his voice was naturally soft, with a quality in it like cream. It was the voice that Tom liked especially.

In reply to the suggestion about Art, Mr. Tollivant replied, as one who sees only a well-meant business proposal,

"We'd like nothing better, Brother Quidmore; but the fact is Art has about as much as he can do for the rest of his vacation." He waved his hand toward Tom. "What do you say to this boy?"

At the glorious suggestion Tom's heart began to fail for fear. He was not a fine boy like Arthur

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Tollivant. The possibility of earning three dollars a week, to say nothing of his board, was too much like the opening up of an Aladdin's palace for the hope to be more than deceptive. It was part of his daily humiliation never to have had any money of his own. The paternity of the State paid for his food, shelter, and education; but it never supplied him with cash, or with any cash that he ever saw. To have three dollars a week jingling in his pocket would not only lift him out of his impotent dependence, but would make him a man. While Mr. Quidmore walked round him, inspecting him as if he were a dog or pig or other small animal for sale, he held himself with straightness, dignity, and strength. If he was for sale he would do his best to be worthy of his price.

Mr. Quidmore nodded toward Mr. Tollivant. "State ward, ain't he?"

Mr. Tollivant admitted that he was.

"Youngster whose moth—"

Mrs. Tollivant interrupted kindly. "You needn't be afraid of that. He's been with us for five years. I think I may say that all traces of the past have been outlived. We can really give him a good character."

Tom was grateful. Mr. Quidmore examined him again. At last he shuffled up to him, throwing his arm across his shoulder, and drawing him close to himself.

"What about it, young fellow? Want to come?"

Entirely won by this display of kindness, the boy smiled up into the twisted face. "Yes, sir."

"Then that's settled. Put your duds together, and

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we'll go along. I guess," he added to Mr. Tollivant, "that you can stretch a point to let him come, and get your permit from the Guardians to-morrow."

Mr. Tollivant agreeing that after five years' care he could venture as much as this, they drove over to Bere in Mr. Quidmore's dilapidated motor car. Mrs. Quidmore met them at the door. Her husband called to her:

"Hello, there! Got a new hand to help you with the strawberries."

She answered, dejectedly. "If he's as good as some of the other new hands you've picked up lately—"

"Oh, rats! Give us a rest! If I brought the angel Gabriel to pick the berries you'd see something to find fault with."

That there was a rift within the lute of this couple's happiness was clear to Tom before he had climbed out of the machine.

"Where's he to sleep?" Mrs. Quidmore asked in her tone of discontent.

"I suppose he can sleep in the barn, can't he?"

"I wouldn't put a dog to sleep in that barn, nasty, smelly, rotten place."

"Well, put him to sleep where you like. He'll get three a week and his keep while he's here, and that's all I'm responsible for." Mrs. Quidmore turned and went into the house. Her husband winked at Tom as man to man. "Can you beat it? Always like that. God! I don't know how I stand it. Get in."

Tom got in, finding an interior as slack as Mrs. Quidmore herself. The Tollivant house, with four

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children in it, was often belittered, but with a little tidying it became spick and span. Here the house-keeping wore an air of hopelessness. Whoever did it did it without heart.

"God! I hate to come into this place," its master confided to Tom, as they stood in the hall, of which the rug lay askew, while a mirror hung crooked on the wall. "You and me could keep the shack looking dandier than this if she wasn't here at all. I wish to the Lord . . ."

But before the week was out the boy had won over Mrs. Quidmore, and begun to make her fond of him. Because he was eager to be useful, he helped her in the house, showing solicitude, too, on her personal account. A low-keyed, sad-eyed woman who did nothing to make herself attractive, she blamed her husband for perceiving the loss of her attractiveness.

"He's bound to me," she would complain, tearfully, to the boy, as he dried the dishes she had washed. "It's his duty to be fond of me. But he ain't. There's fifty women he likes better than he does me."

This note of married infelicity was new to Tom, especially as it reached him from both parties to the contract.

"God, how she gets my goat! Sometimes I think how much I'd enjoy seeing her stretched out with a bullet through her head. I tell you that the fellow who'd do that for me wouldn't be sorry in the end. . . ."

To the boy these words were meaningless. The creamy drawl with which they were uttered robbed them of the vicious or ferocious, making them mere

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humorous explosions. He could laugh at them, and yet he laughed with a feeling of discomfort.

The discomfort was the greater because in kindness to him lay the one point as to which the couple were agreed. Making no attempt to reconcile elements so discordant, all he could do was to soften the conditions which each found distasteful. He kept the house tidier for the man; he did for the woman a few of the things her husband overlooked.

"It's him that ought to do that," she would point out, in dull rebellion. "He's doing it for some other woman I'll be bound. Who is that woman that he meets?"

Conjugal betrayal was also new to Tom, and not easily comprehensible. That a man with a wife should also be "going with a girl" was a possibility that had never come within his experience while living with the Tollivants. He had heard a good many things from Art, as also from some other boys, but this event seemed to have escaped even their wide observation. It would have escaped his own had not Mrs. Quidmore harped on it.

"I do believe he'd like to see me in my grave. I'm in their way, and they'd like to get me out of it. Oh, you needn't tell me! Couldn't you keep an eye on him, and tell me what she's like?"

For Mrs. Quidmore's sake he watched Mr. Quidmore, but as he didn't know what he was watching him for the results were not helpful. And he liked them both. He might have said that he loved them both, since loving came to him so easily. Mrs. Quidmore washed and mended his clothes, and whenever

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she went to Harfrey or some other town she added to his wardrobe. Mr. Quidmore was forever dropping into his ear some gentle, honeyed confidence of which Mrs. Quidmore was the butt. Neither of them ever scolded him, or overworked him. He was in the house almost as a son. And then one day he learned that he was to be there altogether as a son.

XII

HE never knew how and when the question as to his adoption had been raised, or whether the husband or the wife had raised it first. Here, too, the steps were taken with that kind of mystification which shrouded so much of his destiny. He himself was not consulted till, apparently, all the principal parties but himself had decided on the matter. One of the Guardians, or a representative, asked him the formal question as to whether or not he should like it, and being answered with a Yes, had gone away. The next thing he knew he had legally become the son of Martin and Anna Quidmore, and was to be henceforth called by their name.

The outward changes were not many. He had won so much freedom in the house that when he became its son and heir there was, for the minute, little more to give him. His new mother grew more openly affectionate; his new father drove him round in the dilapidated car and showed him to the neighbors as his boy. As far as Tom could judge, there was general approval. Martin Quidmore had taken a poor outcast lad and given him a home and a status in the world. All good people must rejoice in this sort of generosity. The new father rejoiced in it himself, smiling with a twisted smile that was like a leer, the only thing about him which the new son was afraid of.

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It was August now. The picking of the strawberries having long been over, the boy had been kept on for other jobs. He still worked at them. He dug potatoes; he picked peas and beans; he pulled carrots, parsnips, and beets; he culled cucumbers. The hired hands did the heaviest work, but he shared in it to the limit of his strength. Sometimes he went off early in the morning on the great lorry, loaded with garden-truck, which his father drove to the big markets.

On these journeys the new father grew most confidential and lovable. His mellifluous voice, which was sad and at the same time not quite serious, was lovable in itself.

"God, how I'd like to give you a better home than you've got! But it's no use, not as long as she's there. She'll never be anything different. She'd not make things brighter or cleaner or jollier, not even if she was to try."

"Well, she *is* trying," the boy declared, in her defense; but the only answer was a melancholy laugh.

And yet now that he had the duties of a son, he set to work to improve the family relationships. He petted the mother, he cajoled the father. He found small ruses of affection in which, as it seemed to him, he gained both the one and the other, insensibly to either. His proof of this came one morning as once more they were driving to one of the big markets.

"Say, boy, I'm beginning to be worried about her. I don't think she can be well. She's never been sick much; but gosh! now I'll be hanged if I don't think I'll go and see a doctor and ask him to give her some medicine."

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As this thoughtfulness, in spite of all indications to the contrary, implied a fundamental tenderness, the boy was glad of it. He was the more glad of it when, on a morning some days later, and in the same situation, the father drawled, in his casual way:

“Say, I’ve seen that doctor, and he’s given me something he wants her to take. Thinks it will put her all right in no time.”

“And did you give it to her?” he asked, eagerly.

The honeyed voice grew sweeter. “Well, no; that’s the trouble. You can’t get her to take doctor’s stuff, if she knows she’s taking it. Got to get her on the sly. Once when she needed a tonic I used to watch round and put it in her tea. Bucked her up fine.”

“And is that what you’re going to do now?”

“Well, I would, only she’d be afraid of me. Watches me like a cat, don’t you see she does? What I was thinking of was this. You know she makes a cup of tea for herself every day in the middle of the afternoon while we’re out at work. Well, now, if you could make an excuse to slip into the kitchen, and put one of these powders in her teapot—” he tapped the packet in his waistcoat pocket—“she’d never suspect nothing. She’d take it—and be cured.”

The boy was silent.

“You don’t want to do it, hey?”

“Oh, I don’t say that. I was—I was—just wondering.”

“Wondering what?”

“Whether it’s fair play to anyone to give them medicine when they don’t know they’re taking it.”

“But if it’s to do them good?”

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“But ought we to do good to people against their wills?”

“Why, sure! What you thinking of? Still if you don't want to . . .”

The tone hurt him. “Oh, but I will.”

“Say I will, *father*. Why don't you call me that? Don't I call you son?”

He braced himself to an effort. “All right, father; I will.”

“Good! Then here's the powder.” He drew one from the packet. “Don't let none of it fall. You'll steal into the kitchen this afternoon—she generally lays down after she's washed the dinner things—and just empty the paper into the little brown teapot she always makes her tea in. Then burn the paper in the stove—there's sure to be a fire on—so that she won't find nothing lying around to make her suspicious. You understand, don't you?”

He said he understood, though in his heart of hearts he wished that he hadn't been charged with the duty.

XIII

IF you had asked the boy who was now legally Tom Quidmore why he was reluctant to give his mother a powder that would do her good he would have been unable to explain his hesitation. Reason, in the main, was in favor of his doing it. In the first place, he had promised, and he had always responded to those exhortations of his teachers which laid stress on keeping his word. Not to keep his word had come to seem an offense of the nature of personal defilement.

Then the whole matter had been thought out and decreed by an authority higher than himself. The child mind, like the childish mind at all times, is under the weight of authority. The source of the authority is a matter of little moment so long as it speaks decidedly enough. It is always a means by which to get rid of the bother of using private judgment, which as often as not is a bore to the person with the right to it.

In the case of a boy of twelve, private judgment is hampered by a knowledge of his insufficiency. The man who provides food, clothing, shelter, is invested with the right to speak. The child mind is logical, orderly, respectful, and prenatally disposed to discipline. Except on severe provocation it does not rebel. Tom Quidmore felt no impulse to rebellion,

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even though his sense of right and wrong was, for the moment, mystified.

He lacked data. Such data as came to his hearing, and less often to his sight, lay morally outside his range. Like those scientifically minded men who during the childhood of our race registered the phenomena of electricity without going further, he had no power of making deductions from what eyes and ears could record. He knew that there was in life such an element as sexual love; but that was all he knew. It entered into the relations of married people, and in some puzzling way contributed to the birth of children; but of its wanderings and aberrations he had never heard. That man and wife should reach a breaking point was no part of his conception of the things that happened. There was nothing of the kind between the Tollivants, nor among the parents of the lads with whom he had grown up at Harfrey. That which at Harfrey had been clear unrelenting daylight was at Bere a gloaming haunted by strange shapes which perplexed and rather frightened him.

Not until he was fourteen or fifteen years of age, and the Quidmore episode behind him, like an island passed at sea, did the significance of these queer doings and sayings really occur to him. All that for the present his mind and experience were equal to was listening, observing, and wondering. He knew already what it was to have things which he hadn't understood at the time of their happening become clear as he grew older.

An illustration of this came from the small events of that very afternoon. On going back from his

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midday dinner to work in the carrot patch he fixed on half past two as the hour at which he would make the attempt to force on his mother the prescribed medicine. That time having arrived, he rose, brushed the earth from his knees, dusted his hands against each other, and started slowly for the house. A far-away memory which had been in the back of his mind ever since his father had made the odd request now began to assert itself, like the throb of an old pain.

He was a little boy again. In the dim hall of the Swindon Street Home he was listening to the friendly policeman talking to Miss Honiton. He recaptured his own emotions, the dumb distress of the young creature lost in the dark, and ignorant of everything but its helplessness. His mother had taken something, or had not taken something, he wasn't sure which. The beaming young lady handed him his present from the Christmas Tree, and told him that cyanide of potassium—the words were still branded on his brain—was a deadly poison. Then he stood once more, as in memory he had stood so many times, in the half-darkened room where words were mumbled over the long black box which they spoke of as "the body."

Now that it was all in far perspective he knew what it had meant. That is, he knew the type of woman his mother had been; he knew the kind of soil he had sprung from. The events of five years back to a boy of twelve are a very long distance away. So his mother seemed to Tom. So did the sneaking through shops, and the flights from tenement to tenement. So did the awful Christmas Eve when he had lost her. He could think of her tenderly now because

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he understood that her mind had been unhinged. What hurt him with a pain which never fell into perspective was that in trying to create in his boyish way some faint tradition of self-respect, he worked back always to this origin in shame.

While seeing no connection between such far-off things and the task put upon him by his father, he found them jostling each other in his mind. You took something—and there was disaster. It was as far as his thought carried him. After that came the fact that, his respect for authority being strong, he dared not disobey.

He could only dawdle. A delay of five minutes would be five minutes to the good. Besides, dawdling on a hot, windless summer afternoon, on which the butterflies, bees, and humming-birds were the only nonhuman living things not taking a siesta, eased the muscles cramped with long crouching in the carrot beds. There being two ways of getting to the house, he took the longer one.

The longer one led him round the duck pond, whence the heat had driven ashore all the ducks and geese with the exception of one gander. For no particular reason the gander's name was Ernest. Between Ernest and Gimlets, the wire-haired terrier pup, one of those battles such as might take place between Bolivia and Switzerland was in full swing of rage. Gimlets fought from the bank; Ernest from the pond. When Ernest paddled forward, with neck outstretched and nostrils hissing, Gimlets scampered to the top of the shelving shore, where he could stand and bark defiantly. When Ernest swung himself

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round and made for the open sea, Gimlets galloped bravely down to the water's edge, yelping out challenges. This bloody fray gave the boy a further excuse for lingering. Three or four times had Ernest, stung by the taunts to which he had tried to seem indifferent, wheeled round on his enemy. Three or four times had Gimlets scrambled up the bank and down again. But he, too, recognized authority, and a call that he couldn't disobey. A long whistle, and the battle was at an end! Gimlets trotted off.

The whistle came from the grove of pines climbing the little bluff on the side of the duck pond remote from the house. It struck the boy as odd that his father should be there at a time when he was supposed to be cutting New Zealand spinach for the morrow's market. Not to be caught idling, the boy slipped down the bank to creep undetected below the pine-wood bluff. Neither seeing nor being seen, he nevertheless heard voices, catching but a single word. The word was Bertha, and it was spoken by his father. The only Bertha in the place was a certain beautiful young widow living in Bere. That his father should be talking to her in the pinewood was another of those details difficult to explain.

More difficult to explain he found a little scene he caught on looking backward. Having now passed the bluff, he was about to round the corner of the pond where the path led through a plantation of blue spruces which hid the house. His glancing back was an accident, but it made him witness of an incident pastoral in its charm.

Bertha, being indeed the beautiful young widow,

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the boy was astonished to see his father steal a kiss from her. Bertha responded with such a slap as nymphs give to shepherds, running playfully away. His father shambled after her, as shepherds after nymphs, catching her in his arms.

Tom plunged into the blue spruce plantation where he could be out of sight. Hot as he was already, he grew hotter still. What he had seen was so silly, so stupid, so undignified! He wished he hadn't seen it. Having seen it, he wished he could forget it. He couldn't forget it because, unpleasant as he found it, he was somehow aware that it had bearings beyond unpleasantness. What they were he had nothing to tell him. He could only run through the plantation as if he would leave the thing as quickly as possible behind him; and all at once the house came into sight.

With the house in sight he remembered again what he had come to do. He stopped running. His steps again began to lag. Feeling for the powder in his waistcoat pocket, he reminded himself that it would do his mother good. The house lay sleeping and silent in the heat. He crept up to the back door.

And there at the open window stood his mother rolling dough on a table. She rolled languidly, as she did everything. Her head drooped a little to one side; her expression was full of that tremulous protest against life which might with a word break into a rain of tears.

Relieved and delighted, he stole round the house, to enter by another way. She was now lifting a cover of the stove, so that she didn't hear his approach. Before she knew that anyone was there he had slipped

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his arm around her, and smacked a big kiss on her cheek. She turned slowly, the lifter in her hand. A new life seemed to dawn in her, brightening her eyes and flushing her sallowness.

“You bad little boy! What did you come home for?”

He replied as was true, that he had come for a drink of water. He had meant to take a drink of water after putting her powder in the teapot. “I thought,” he ended, “you’d be lying down asleep.”

“I was lying down, but something made me get up.”

He was curious. “Something—like what?”

“Well, I just couldn’t sleep. And then I remembered that it was a long time since I’d made him any of them silver cookies he used to be so fond of.”

He liked the name. “Is that what you’re baking?”

“Yes; and you’ll . . .” she went back to the table, picking up the cutter—“you’ll have some for supper if you’ll—if you’ll call me ma.”

“But I do.”

Her smile had the slow timidity that might have been born of disuse. “Yes, when I ask you. But I want you to do it all the time, and natural.”

“All right then; I will—ma.”

While he stood drinking a first, and then a second, cup of water, she began on the memories dear to her, but which few now would listen to. She had been born in Wilmington, Delaware, where Martin also had been born. His father worked in a powder factory in that city. It was owing to an explosion when he was a lad that Martin’s frame had been partially paralyzed.

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“He wasn’t blowed up or anything; he just got a shock. He was awful delicate, and used to have fits till he grew out of them. I think the crook in his face makes him look aristocratic, don’t you?”

The boy having said that he didn’t know but what it did, she continued plaintively, cutting out her cookies with a heart-shaped cutter.

“I wa’s awful pretty in those days, and that refined. I wouldn’t hardly do a thing for my mother in the house, or carry the tiniest little parcel across the street. I was just born ladylike. And when Martin and I were married he let me have a girl for the first two years to do everything. All he ever expected of me was to get up and dress, and look stylish; and now . . .”

As she paused in her cutting to press back a sob, the boy took the opportunity to speak of getting back to work.

“I think I must beat it, ma. I’ve got all those carrots—”

“Oh, wait a little while. He can spare you for a few minutes, can’t he? Anyhow, nothing you can do’ll save him from going bankrupt. This place don’t pay. He’ll never make it pay. His work was to run a hat store. That’s what he did when he married me, and he made swell money at it, too.”

The family history interested the boy, as all tales did which accounted for the personal. He knew now how Martin Quidmore’s health had broken down, and the doctor had ordered out-of-door life as a remedy. Out-of-door life would have been impossible if an

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uncle hadn't died and left him fifteen thousand dollars.

"Enough to live on quite genteel for life," his wife complained, "but nothing would do but that he should think himself a market-gardener, him that couldn't tell a turnip from a spade. Blew in the whole thing on this place, away from everywheres, and making me a drudge that hardly knew so much as to wash a dish. Even that I could have stood if he'd only gone on loving me as his marriage vows made it his duty to do, but—"

"I'll love you, ma," the boy declared, tenderly. "You don't have to cry because there's no one to love you, not while I'm around."

The new life in her eyes was as much of incredulity as of joy. "Don't say that, dearie, if you don't mean it. You don't have to love me just because I'm trying to be a mother to you, and look after your clothes."

"But, ma, I want to. I do."

They gazed at each other, she with the cutter in her hand, he with the cup. What he saw was not a feeble, slatternly woman, but some one who wanted him. He had not been wanted by anyone since the night when his mudda—he still used the word in his deep silences—had gone away with the wardress who looked like a Fate. In the five intervening years he had suffered less from unkindness than from being shut out of hearts. Here was a heart that had need of him, so that he had need of it. The type of heart didn't matter. If it made any difference it was only that where there was weakness the appeal to him was

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the greater. With this poor thing he would have something on which to spend his treasure.

“You’ll see, ma! I’ll bring in the water for you, and split the kindlings, and get up in the morning and light the fire, and milk the cow, and everything.”

Straight and sturdy, he looked at her with the level gaze of eyes that seemed the calmer and more competent because they were hidden so far beneath his bushy, horizontal eyebrows. The uniform tan from working in the sun heightened his air of manliness. Even the earth on his clothes, and a smudge of it across his forehead where a dirty hand had been put up to push back his crisp ashen hair, hinted at his capacity to share in the world’s work. To the helpless woman whose prop had failed her, the coming of this young strength to her aid was little short of a miracle.

In the struggle between tears and laughter she was almost hysterical. “Oh, you darling boy!” she was beginning, advancing to clasp him in her arms. But with old, old memories in his heart he dreaded the paroxysm of affection.

“All right, ma!” he laughed, dodging her and slipping out. “I’ve got to beat it, or fath—” he stumbled on the word because he found it difficult to use—“or father will wonder where I am.” But once in the yard, he called back consolingly, though keeping to the practical, “Don’t you bother about Geraldine. I’ll go round by the pasture and drive her home as I come back from work. I’ll milk her, too.”

“God bless you, dearie!”

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Standing in the doorway, shading her eyes with her hand, her limp figure seemed braced to a new power, as she watched him till he disappeared within the plantation of blue spruces.

XIV

WHEN a whistle blew at five o'clock the hired men on the Quidmore place stopped working. As a son of the house, Tom Quidmore paid to the signal only enough attention to pile his carrots into a wheelbarrow and convey them to the spot where they would help to furnish the market lorry in the morning. In fulfillment of his promise to his adopted mother, he then went in search of Geraldine.

Of all the tasks that he liked at Bere he liked most going to the pasture. It was not his regular work. As regular work it belonged to old Diggory; but old Diggory was as willing to be relieved of it as Mrs. Quidmore of the milking. Brushing himself down, and washing his hands at the tap in the garage after a fashion that didn't clean them, he marched off, whistling. He whistled because his heart was light. His heart was light because his mother having been in the kitchen, he had escaped the necessity for giving her the medicine as to which he felt his odd reluctance.

Leaving the garage behind him, he threaded a tiny path running through the beet-field. The turnip-field came next, after which he entered a strip of fine old timber, coming out from that on the main road to Bere. Along this road, for some five hundred yards, he tramped merrily, kicking up the dust. He liked this road. Not only was it open, free, and straight, but along its old stone walls raspberries and black-

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berrics grew ripe in a tangle of wild spirea, meadow-rue, jewel weed, and Queen Anne's lace. He loved this luxuriance, this summer sense of abundance. To the boy who had never known anything but poverty, Nature at least, in this lush Connecticut countryside, seemed generous.

The pasture was on the edge of a scrubby woodland in which the twenty acres of the Quidmore property trailed away into the unkempt. Eighty or a hundred years earlier, it had been the center of a farm now cut up into small holdings, chiefly among market gardeners. In the traces of the old farmhouse, the old garden, the old orchard, the boy found his imagination touched by the pathos of a vanished human past.

The land sloped from the hillside, till in the bottom of the hollow it became a little brambly wood such as in England would be called a spinney. Through the spinney trickled a stream which somewhere fell into Horseneck Brook, which somewhere fell into one of those shallow inlets that the Sound thrusts in on the coastline. Halfway between the road and the streamlet, was the old home-place, deserted so long ago that the cellar was choked with blackberry vines, and the brick of the foundation bulging out of plumb. A clump of lilac which had once snuggled lovingly against a south wall was now a big solitary bush. What used to be a bed of pansies had reverted to a scattering of cheery little heartsease faces, brightening the grass. The low-growing, pale-rose mallow of old gardens still kept up its vigor of bloom, throwing out a musky scent. There was something wistful in the

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spot, especially now that the sun was westering, and the birds skimmed low, making for their nests.

In going for Geraldine Tom always stole a few minutes to linger among these memories of old joys and sorrows, old labors and rewards, of which nothing now remained but these few flowers, a few wind-beaten apple trees, and this dint in the ground which served best as a shelter for chipmunks. It was the part of the property farthest from the house. It was far, too, from any other habitation, securing him the privilege of solitude. The privilege was new to him. At Harfrey he had never known it. About the gardens, even at Bere, there were always the owner, the hired men, the customers, the neighbors who came and went. But in Geraldine's pasture he found only herself, the crows, the robins, the thrushes singing in the spinney, and the small wild life darting from one covert to another, or along the crumbling stone wall hung with its loopings of wild grape.

He was not lonely on these excursions. Companionship had never in the Harfrey schools been such a pleasure that he missed anything in having to do without it. Rather, he enjoyed the freedom to be himself, to wear no mask, to have no part to play. It was only when alone like this that he understood how much of his thought and effort was spent in dancing to other people's tunes. In the Tollivant home he could never, like the other children, speak or act without a second thought. As a State ward it was his duty to commend himself. To commend himself he was obliged to think twice even before venturing on trifles. He had formed a habit of thinking twice, of

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rarely being spontaneous. By himself in this homey pasture he felt the relief of one who has been balancing on a tight rope at walking on the ground.

When he had climbed the bars Geraldine, who was down the hill and near the spinney, had lifted her head and swung her tail in recognition. Not being impatient, she went on with her browsing, leaving him a few minutes' liberty. Among the heartsease and the mallows he flung himself down, partly because he was tired and partly that he might think. With so much to think about thought came without sequence. It centered soon on what he was to be.

Of one thing he was certain; he didn't want to be a market gardener. Not but that he enjoyed the open-air life and the novelty of closeness to the soil. Like the whole Quidmore connection, it was good enough for the time. All the same, it was only for the time, and one day he would break away from it. How, he didn't ask. He merely knew by his intuitions that it would be so.

He was going to be something big. That, too, was intuitive conviction. What he meant by big he was unable to define, beyond the fact that knowledge and money would enter into it. He was interested in money, not so much for what it gave you as for what it was. It was a queer thing when you came to think of it. A dollar bill in itself had no more value than any other scrap of paper; and yet it would buy a dollar's worth of anything. He turned that over in his mind till he worked out the reason why. He worked out the principle of payment by check, which at first was as blank a mystery as marital relations. When

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newspapers came his way he studied the reports of the stock exchange, much as a savage who cannot read scans the unmeaning hieroglyphs which to wiser people are words. He did make out that railways and other great utilities must be owned by a lot of people who combined to put their money into them; but daily fluctuations in value he couldn't understand. When he asked his adopted father he was told that he couldn't understand it, though he knew he could.

Long accustomed to this answer as to the bewilderments of life, he rarely now asked anything. If he was puzzled he waited for more data. Even for little boys things cleared themselves up if you kept them in your mind, and applied the explanation when it came your way. The point, he concluded, was not to be in a hurry. There were the spiders. He was fond of watching them. They would sit for hours as still as metal things, their little eyes fixed like jewels in a ring. Then when they saw what they wanted one swift dart was enough for them. So it must be with little boys. You got one thing to-day, and another thing to-morrow; but you got everything in time if you waited and kept alert.

By waiting and keeping alert he would find out what he was to be. He had reached his point when he saw Geraldine pacing up the hill toward the pasture bars. She was giving him the hint that certain acknowledged rites were no longer to be put off.

He had lowered the bars, over which she was stepping delicately, when he saw his father come tearing down the road, going toward Bere, with all the speed his shuffling gait could put on. Used by this

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time to erratic actions on Quidmore's part, he was hardly surprised; he was only curious. He was more curious still when, on drawing nearer, the man seemed in a panic. "Looks as if he was running away from something," was the lad's first thought, though he couldn't imagine from what.

"Is anything the matter?"

From panic the indications changed to those of surprise, though the voice was as velvety as ever.

"Oh, so it's you! I thought it was Diggory. What did you—what did you—do with that powder?"

The boy began putting up the bars while Geraldine plodded homeward.

"I couldn't give it to her. She was in the kitchen baking." He thought it wise to add: "She was making silver cookies for you. You'll have them for supper."

There followed more odd phenomena, of which the boy, waiting and keeping alert, only got the explanation later. Quidmore threw himself face downward on the wayside grass. With his forehead resting on his arm, he lay as still as one of those drunken men Tom had occasionally seen like logs beside some country road. Geraldine turned her head to ask why she was not followed, but the boy stood waiting for a further sign. He wondered whether all grown-up men had minutes like this, or whether it was part of the epilepsy he had heard about.

But when Quidmore got up he was calm, the traces of panic having disappeared. To a more experienced person the symptoms would have been of relief; but to the lad of twelve they said nothing.

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"I'll go back with you," was Quidmore's only comment, as together they set out to follow Geraldine.

Having reached the barn where the milking was to be done, Quidmore was proceeding to the house. In the hope of a negative, Tom asked if he should try again to-morrow.

Quidmore half turned. "I'll leave that to you."

"I'll do whatever you say," Tom pleaded, desperate at this responsibility.

Quidmore went on his way, calling back, in his creamy drawl, over his shoulder: "I'll leave it entirely to you."

XV

LEFT to him, Tom saw nothing in the duty but to do it. He was confirmed in this resolution by Quidmore's gentleness throughout the evening. It was a new thing in Tom's experience of the house. As always with those in the habit of inflicting pain, merely to stop inflicting it seemed kindness. Supper passed without a single incident that made Mrs. Quidmore wince. On her part she played up with an almost brilliant vivacity in making none of her impotent complaints. Anything he could do to further this accord the boy felt he ought to do.

He hung back only from the deed. That made him shudder. He was clear on the point that it made him shudder because of its association in his mind with the thing which had happened years before; and that, he knew, was foolish. If it would please his father he should make the attempt. He should make it perhaps the more heartily since he was free not to make it if he chose.

It was the freedom that troubled him. So long as he did only what he was told he had nothing on his conscience. Now he must be sure that he was right; and he was not sure. Once more he didn't question the fact that the medicine would do his mother good. The right and wrong in his judgment centered round doing her good against her own will.

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With no finespun theories concerning the rights of the individual, he was pretty certain as to what they were.

A divine beauty came over the evening when, after he had gone to bed about half-past eight, his mother, in the new blossoming of her affection, came to tuck him in, and kiss him good night. No such thing had happened to him since Mrs. Crewdson had last done it. Mrs. Tollivant went through this endearing rite with all her own children; but him she left out. Many a time, when from his bed beneath the eaves he heard her making her rounds at night, he had pressed his face into the pillow to control the trembling of his lips. True, he had come to regard the attention as too babyish for a man of twelve; but now that it was shown him he was touched by it.

It brought to his memory something Mrs. Crewdson had said, and which he had never forgotten. "God's wherever there's love, it seems to me, dear. I bring a little bit of God to you, and you bring a little bit of God to me, and so we have Him right here." Mrs. Quidmore, too, brought a little bit of God to him, and he brought a little bit of God to Mrs. Quidmore. They showed God to each other, as if without each other they were not quite able to see Him. The fact suggested the thought that in the matter of the secret administration of the medicine he might pray.

One thing he had learned with some thoroughness while in the Tollivant family, and that was religion. Both in Sunday school and in domestic instruction he had studied it conscientiously, and conscientiously accepted it. If he sometimes admitted to Bertie

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Tollivant, the cripple, that he "didn't see much sense in it," the confession applied to his personal inabilities. Bertie was the cynic and unbeliever in the Tollivant household. "There's about as much sense in it," he would declare secretly to Tom, "as there is in those old yarns about Pilgrim's Progress and Jack and the Beanstalk. Only don't say that to ma or pop, because the poor dears wouldn't get you." On Tom this skepticism only made the impression that he and Bertie didn't understand religion any more than they understood sex, which was also a theme of discussion. They would grow to it in time, by keeping ears and eyes open.

Now that he was away from the Tollivants, in a world where religion was never spoken of, he dismissed it from his mind. That is, he dismissed its intricacies, its complicated doctrines, its galloping through prayers you were too sleepy to think of at night, and too hurried in the morning. Here he was admittedly influenced by Bertie. "If God loves you, and knows what you want, what's the good of all this Now I lay me? It'd be a funny kind of God that wouldn't look after you anyhow." Tom had given up saying Now I lay me, partly because that, too, seemed babyish, but mainly on account of Bertie's reasoning. "It's more of a compliment to God," was his way of explaining it to himself, "to know that He'll do right of His own accord, than to suppose He'll do it just because I pester Him." So every night when he got into bed he took a minute to say to himself that God was taking care of him, making this confidence serve in place of more explicit peti-

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tion. When he had anything special to pray about, he said, he would begin again.

And now something special had arisen. He got out of bed. He didn't kneel down because, being anxious not to mislead God by giving Him wrong information, he had first to consider what he ought to say. Stealing softly across the floor, lest the creaking of the boards should betray the fact that he was up, he went to the open window, and looked out.

It was one of those mystic nights which, to a soul inclined to the mystical, seem to hold a spiritual secret. The air, scented by millions of growing things, though chiefly with the acrid perfume of the blue spruces on which he looked down, had a pungent, heavenly odor such as he never caught in the daytime. There was a tang of salt in it, too, as from the direction of the Sound came the faintest rustle of a breeze. The rustle was so faint as not to break a stillness, which was more of the nature of a holy suspense because of the myriads of stars.

Seeking a formula in which to couch his prayer, he found a phrase of Mr. Tollivant's often used in domestic intercession. "And, O Heavenly Father, we beseech thee to act wisely in the matter of our needs." What constituted wisdom in the matter of their needs would then be pointed out by Mr. Tollivant according to the day's or the season's requirements. Accepting this language as that of high inspiration, and forgetting to kneel down, the boy began as he stood, looking out on the sanctified darkness:

"And, O Heavenly Father, I beseech thee to act

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wisely in the matter of my needs." Hung up there for lack of archaic grandiloquence, he found himself ending lamely: "And don't let me give it to her if I oughtn't to, for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen."

With his effort he was disappointed. Not only had the choice of words not taken from Mr. Tollivant been ludicrously insufficient, but he had forgotten to kneel down. He had probably vitiated the whole prayer. He thought of revision, of constructing a sentence that would balance Mr. Tollivant's, and beginning again with the proper ceremonial. But Bertie's way of reasoning came to him again. "I guess He knows what I mean anyhow." He recoiled at that, however, shocked at his own irreverence. The thought was a blasphemous liberty taken with the watchful and easily offended deity of whom Mr. and Mrs. Tollivant had begged him always to be afraid. He was wondering if by approaching this God at all he hadn't made his plight worse, when the rising of the wind diverted his attention.

It rose suddenly, in a great soft sob, but not of pain. Rather, it was of exultation, of cosmic joyousness. Coming from the farthest reaches of the world, from the Atlantic, from Africa, from remote islands and mountain tops, it blew in at the boy's window with a strong, and yet gentle, cosmic force.

"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind."

Tom Quidmore had but one source of quotation, but he had that at his tongue's end. The learning by heart of long passages from the Bible had been part of his education at the hands of Mr. and Mrs.

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Tollivant. Rightly or wrongly, he quoted the Scriptures, and rightly oftener than not. He quoted them now because, all at once, his room seemed full of the creative breath. He didn't say so, of course; but, confusedly, he felt it. All round the world there was wind. It was the single element in Nature which you couldn't see, but of which you received the living invigoration. It cooled, it cleansed, it strengthened. Wherever it passed there was an answer. The sea rose; the snows drifted; the trees bent; men and women strove to use and conquer it. A rushing mighty wind! A sound from heaven! That it might be an answer to his prayer he couldn't stop to consider because he was listening to the way it rose and fell, and sighed and souged and swelled triumphantly through the plantation of blue spruces.

By morning it was a gale. The tall things on the property, the bush peas, the scarlet runners, the sweet corn, were all being knocked about. In spots they lay on the earth; in other spots they staggered from the perpendicular. All hands, in the words of old Diggory, had their work cut out for them. Tom's job was to rescue as many as possible of the ears of sweet corn, in any case ready for picking, before they were damaged.

But at half-past two he dragged himself out of the corn patch to fulfill the dreaded duty. Nothing had answered his prayer. He had not so much as seen his father throughout the day, as the latter had gone to the markets and had not returned. The gale was still raging, and he might be waiting for it to go down.

Since the scene by the roadside on the previous

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afternoon he had taken a measure of his father not very far from accurate. He, Quidmore, wanted something of which he was afraid. He was too much afraid of it to press for it urgently; and yet he wanted it so fiercely that he couldn't give it up. What it was the boy could not discover, except that it had something to do with them all. When he said with them all he included the elusive Bertha; though why he included her he once more didn't know.

In God he was disappointed; that he did not deny. In spite of the shortcomings of his prayer, he had clung to the hope that they might be overlooked. He argued a little from what he himself would have done had anyone come with a request inadequately phrased. He wouldn't think of the manners or the words in his eagerness to do what lay within his power. With God apparently it was not so.

There was, of course, the other effect of his prayer. He had only asked to be stopped if the thing was not to be done. If he was not stopped the inference was obvious. He was to go ahead. It was in order to go ahead that he left the corn patch.

The kitchen when he got to it was empty. Both the windows, that in the south wall and that in the west, were open to let the wind sweep out the smell of cooking. Creeping halfway up the stairs, he saw that his mother had closed her bedroom door, a sign that she was really lying down. There was no help now for what he had to do.

He stole back to the kitchen again. On the dresser he saw the brown teapot in which she would presently make her tea. He would only have to take it down,

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and spill the powder into it. The powder was in his waistcoat pocket. He drew it out. It was small and flat, in a neatly folded paper. Opening the paper, he saw something innocent and white, not unlike the sugar you spread on strawberries. Laying it in readiness on the table by the west window, at which his mother baked, he turned to take down the teapot.

The gale grew fiercer. It was almost a tornado. With the teapot in his two hands he paused to look out of the south window at the swaying of the blue spruces. They moaned, they sobbed, they rocked wildly. You might have fancied them living creatures seized by a madness of despair. The fury of the wind, even in the kitchen, blew down a dipper hanging on the wall.

There was now no time to lose. The noise of the falling dipper might have disturbed his mother, so that at any minute she might come downstairs. With the teapot again in his hands he turned to the table where he had left the thing which was to do her good.

It was not there.

Dismayed, startled, he looked for it on the floor; but it was not there. It was not anywhere in the kitchen. He searched and searched.

Going outside, he found the paper caught in a rosebush under the window, but the something innocent and white had been blown to the four corners of the world.

The rushing mighty wind had done its work; and yet it was not till two or three years later, when the Quidmores had passed from his life, that he wondered if after all his prayer had not been answered.

XVI

OF helping his mother against her will he never heard any more. When his father returned that evening he had the same look of panic as on the previous day, followed by the same expression of relief at seeing the domestic life going on as usual. But he asked no questions, nor did he ever bring the subject up again. When a day or two later Tom explained to him that the powder had been blown away he merely nodded, letting the matter rest.

Autumn came on and Tom went to school at Bere. He liked the school. No longer a State ward, but the son of a man supposed to be of substance, he passed the tests inflicted by the savage snobbery of children. His quickness at sports helped him to a popularity justified by his good nature. With the teachers he was often forced to seem less intelligent than he was, so as to escape the odious soubriquet of "teacher's pet."

On the whole, the winter was the happiest he had so far known. It could have been altogether happy had it not been for the tragic situation of the Quidmores. After the brief improvement that had followed on his coming they had reacted to a mutual animosity even more intense. Each made him a confidant.

"God! it's all I can do to keep my hands off her," the soft drawl confessed. "If she was just to die of

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a sickness, and me have nothing to do with it, I don't believe I'd be satis—" He held the sentence there as a matter of precaution. "What do you think of a woman who all the years you've known her has never done anything but whine, whine, whine, because you ain't givin' her what you promised?"

"And are you?" Tom asked, innocently.

"I give her what I can. She don't tempt me to do anything extra. Say, now, would she tempt you?"

Tom did his best to take the grown-up, man-to-man tone in which he was addressed. "I think she's awful tempting, if you take her the right way."

To take her the right way, to take him also the right way, was the boy's chief concern throughout the winter. To get them to take each other the right way was beyond him.

"So long as he goes outside his home," Mrs. Quidmore declared, with an euphemism of which the boy did not get the significance, "I'll make him suffer for it."

"But, ma, he can't stay home all the time."

"Oh, don't tell me that you don't know what I mean! If you wasn't on his side you'd have found out for me long ago who the woman is. Just tell me that—"

"And what would you do?"

"I'd kill her, I think, if I got the chance."

"Oh, but ma!"

She brandished the knife with which she was cutting cold ham for the supper. "I would! I would!"

"But you wouldn't if I asked you not to, would you, ma?"

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The knife fell with a despairing movement of the hand. "Oh, I don't suppose I should do it at all. But he ought to love me."

"Can he make himself love you, ma?"

The ingenuous question went so close to the point that she could only dodge it. "Why shouldn't he? I'm his wife, ain't I?"

The challenge brought out another of the mysteries which surrounded marriage, as a penumbra fringes the moon on a cloudy night. When his father next reverted to the theme, while driving back from market, the penumbra became denser.

"Say, boy, don't you go to thinking that the first time you fall in love with a pretty face it's goin' to be for life. That's where the devil sets his snare for men. Eight or ten years from now you'll see some girl, and then the devil 'll be after you. He'll try to make you think that if you don't marry that girl your one and only chance 'll come and go. And when he does, my boy, just think o' me."

"Think of you—what about?"

The sweetness of the tone took from the answer anything like bitterness. "Think how I got pinched. Gosh, when I look back and remember that I was as crazy to get her as a pup to catch a squir'l I can't believe it was me. But don't forget what I'm tellin' you. No fellow ought to think of bein' married till he's over thirty. He can't be expected to know what he'll love permanent till then."

It was the perpetual enigma. "But you always love your wife when you're married to her, don't you?"

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The answer was in loud satirical laughter, with the observation that Tom was the limit for innocence.

Quite as disturbing as questions of love and marriage were those relating to the fact that the man who had done very well as a hatter was a failure as a market gardener.

“A hell of a business, this is! Rothschild and Rockefeller together couldn't make it pay. Gosh, how I hate it! Hate everything about it, and home worst of all. Know a little woman that if she'd light out with me . . .”

In different keys and conjunctions these confidences were made to the boy all through the winter. If they did not distress him more it was because they were over his head. The disputes of the gods affect mortals only indirectly. When Jupiter and Juno disagree men feel that they can leave it to Olympus to manage its own affairs. So to a boy of twelve the cares of his elders pass in spheres to which he has little or no access. In spite of his knowledge that their situation was desperate, the couple who had adopted him were mighty beings to Tom Quidmore, with resources to meet all needs. To be so went with being grown up and, in a general way, with being independent.

Their unbosomings worried him; they did not do more. When they were over he could dismiss them from his mind. His own concerns, his lessons, his games, his friends and enemies in school, and the vague objective of becoming “something big,” were his matters of importance. Martin and Anna Quidmore cared for him so much, though each with a dash

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of selfishness, that his inner detachment from them both would have caused them pain.

And yet it was because of this detachment that he was able, in some sense, to get through the winter happily. Whatever might have hurt him most passed on the kind of Mount Olympus where grown-up people had their incredible interests. Told, as he always was, that he couldn't understand them, he was willing to drop them at that till they were forced on him again. As spring was passing into summer they were forced on him less persistently; and then one day, quite unexpectedly, he struck the beginning of the end.

It was a Saturday. As there was no school that day he had driven in on the truck with his father, to market a load of lettuce and early spinach. On returning through Bere in the latter part of the forenoon, Quidmore stopped at the druggist's.

"Jump down and have an ice cream soda. I'll leave the lorry here, and come back to you. Errand to do in the village."

The words had been repeated so often that for these excursions they had come to be a formula. By this time Tom knew the errand to be at Bertha's house, which was indirectly opposite. Seated at a table in the window, absorbing his cool, flavored drink through a pair of straws, he could see his father run up the steps and enter, running down again when he came out. Further than the fact that there was something regrettable in the visit, something to be concealed when he went home, the boy's mind did not work.

The tragedy of that morning was that, as he was

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enjoying himself thus, the runabout, driven by one of the hired men, glided up to the door, and Mrs. Quidmore, dressed for shopping, and very alert, sprang out. As she rarely came into Bere, and almost never in the morning when she had her work to do, Tom's surprise was tinged at once with fear. Recognizing the lorry, Mrs. Quidmore rushed into the drug store. Except for the young man, wearing a white coat, who tended it, the long narrow slit was empty. As he peeped above his glass, with the two straws between his lips, Tom saw the wrath of the wronged when close on the track of the wrong-doer. Wheeling round, she caught him looking conscious and guilty.

"Oh! So you're here? Where is he?"

Tom answered truthfully. "He said he had an errand to do. He didn't tell me what it was."

"And is he coming back for you here?"

"He said he would."

"Then I'll wait."

To wait she sat down at Tom's side, having Bertha's house within range. Whether she suspected anything or not Tom couldn't tell, since he hardly suspected anything himself. That there was danger in the air he knew by the violence with which she rejected his proposal to refresh herself with ice cream.

"There he is!"

They watched him while he came down the steps, hesitated a minute, and turned in the direction away from where they were waiting. Tom understood this move.

"He's going to Jenkins's about that new tire."

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As she jumped to her feet her movements had a fierceness of activity he had never before seen in her.

“That’s all I want. I’m goin’ back. Don’t you say you seen me, or that I’ve been over here at all.”

Hurrying to the street and springing into the car, she bade the hired man turn round again for home.

What happened between that Saturday and the next Tom never knew exactly. A few years later, when his powers of deduction had developed, he was able to surmise; but beyond his own experience he had no accurate information. That there were bitter quarrels he inferred from the sullenness they left behind; but he never witnessed them. Not having witnessed them, he had little or no sense of a strain more serious than usual.

On the next Saturday afternoon he was crouched in the potato field, picking off the ugly reddish bugs and killing them. Suddenly he heard himself called. On rising and looking round he found the runabout car stopped in the road, and Billy Peet, one of the hired men, beckoning him to approach. Brushing his hands against each other, he stepped carefully over the rows of young potatoes, and was soon in the roadway.

“Get in,” Billy Peet ordered, briefly. “The boss sent me over to fetch you.”

“Sent you over to fetch me—in the machine? What’s up?” His eye fell on a small straw suitcase in the back of the car. “What’s that for?”

“Get in, and I’ll tell you as we go along.” Tom clambered in beside the driver. “Mis’ Quidmore’s sick.”

“What’s the matter with her?”

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"I'd'n know. Awful sick, they say."

When they passed the Quidmore entrance without turning in Tom began to be startled. "Say! Where we going?"

"You're not going home. Doctor don't want you there. Boss telephoned over to Mrs. Tollivant, and she's goin' to keep you till Mis' Quidmore's better—or somethin'."

The boy was not often resentful, but he did resent being trundled about like a package. If his mother was sick his place was at home. He could light the fire, bring in the water from the well, and do the score of little things for which a small boy can be useful. To be shunted off like this, as if he could only be an additional care, was an indignity to the thirteen years he was now supposed to have attained to. But what could he do? Protest was useless. There was nothing for it but to go where he was driven, like Geraldine or the dilapidated car.

And yet at Harfrey he settled down among the Tollivants naturally. No State ward having succeeded him, his room under the eaves was still vacant. Once within its familiar shelter, he soon began to feel as if he had never been away. The family welcomed him with the shades of warmth which went with their ages and characters—Mr. and Mrs. Tollivant overcoming their repugnance to a born waif with that Christian charity which doubtless is all the nobler for being visibly against the grain; Art, now a swaggering fellow of sixteen, with patronizing good nature; Cilly, who affected baby-blue ribbons on a blond pigtail, with airs and condescension; Bertie, the

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cripple, with satiric cordiality. If it was not exactly a home-coming, it was at least as good as a visit to old friends. He was touched by being included almost as a member of the family in Mr. Tollivant's evening prayer.

"And, O Heavenly Father, take this young wanderer as Thy child, even as we offer him a shelter. Visit not Thine anger upon him, lest he be tempted overmuch."

At the thought of being tempted overmuch Tom felt a pleasing sense of importance. It offered, too, a loophole for excuse in case he should fall. If God didn't intervene on his behalf, easing temptation up, then God would be responsible. And yet, such was the lack of fairness he was bidden to see in God, He would knock a fellow down and then punish him when he tumbled.

In the midst of these reflections a thought of the Quidmore household choked him with unexpected homesickness. The people who had been kind to him were in trouble, and he was not there! He wondered what they would do without him. He could sometimes catch the man's cruelties and turn them into pleasantries before they reached the wife. He could sometimes forestall the wife's complaints and twist them into little mollifying compliments. Would there be anyone to do that now? Would they keep the peace? He wished Mr. Tollivant would pray for them. He tried to pray for them himself, but, as with his effort of the previous year, the right kind of words would not come. If only God could be addressed without so much Thee and Thou! If only He could

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read a little boy's heart without calling for fine language! For lack of fine language he had to remain dumb, leaving God, who might possibly have helped Martin and Anna Quidmore, with no information about them.

Nevertheless, with the facile emotions of youth, a half hour later he was playing checkers with Bertie, in full enjoyment of the game. He slept soundly that night, and on Sunday fell into the old routine of church and Sunday school. Monday and Tuesday bored him, because for most of the day school claimed the children; but when they came home, and played and squabbled as usual, life took on its old zest. Only now and then did the thought of the sick woman and the lonely man sweep across him in a spasm of pain; after which he could forget them and be cheerful.

But on Wednesday forenoon, as he was turning away from watching the Plymouth Rocks pecking at their feed, his father arrived in the old runabout. Dashing up the hill, Tom reached the back door in time to see him enter by the front.

"How's ma?"

He got no answer, because Quidmore followed Mrs. Tollivant into the front parlor, where they shut the door. In anticipation of being taken home, the boy ran up to his room and packed his bag.

"How's ma?"

He called out the question from halfway down the stairs. Quidmore, emerging from the parlor with Mrs. Tollivant, ignored it again. Bidding good-by to his hostess and thanking her for taking in the boy, he went through these courtesies with a nervous anxiety

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almost amounting to anguish to convince her of the truth of something he had said.

“How’s ma?”

They were in the car at last so that he could no longer be denied.

“She’s—she’s—not there.”

All the events of the past year focussed themselves into the question that now burst on Tom’s lips. “Is she—dead?”

The lisping voice was sorrowful. “She was buried yesterday.”

With his habit of thinking twice, the boy asked nothing more. Having asked nothing at the minute, he felt less inclined to ask anything as they drove onward. Something within him rejected the burden of knowing. While he would not hold himself aloof, he would not involve himself more than events involved him according as they fell out. His reasoning was obscure, but his instincts, grown self-protective from necessity, were positive. Whatever had happened, whatever was to be right and wrong to other people, his own motive must be loyalty.

“I’ve got to stick to him,” he was saying to himself. “He’s been awful good to me. In a kind of a way he’s my father. I must stand by him, and see him through, just as if I was his son.”

It was his first grown-up resolution.

XVII

GROWN-UP life began at once. His chief care hitherto had been as to what others would do for him; now he was preoccupied with what he could do for some one else. It was a matter of watching, planning, cheering, comforting, and as he expressed it to himself, of bucking up. Of bucking up especially he was prodigal. The man had become as limp as on the day when he had thrown himself face downward in the grass. Mad once with desire to act, he was terrified now at what he had done. Though, as far as Tom could judge, no one blamed or suspected him, there was hardly a minute in the day in which he did not betray himself. He betrayed himself to the boy even if to no one else, though betraying himself in such a way that there was nothing definite to take hold of. "I'm sure—and yet I'm not sure," was Tom's own summing up. He stressed the fact that he was not sure, and in this he was helped by the common opinion of the countryside.

Toward the bereaved husband and his adopted son this was sympathetic. The woman had always been neurasthenic, slipshod, and impossible. With a wife to help him, Martin Quidmore could have been a success as a market gardener as easily as anybody else. As it was, he would get over the shock of this tragedy and find a woman who would be the right kind of mother to a growing boy. Here, the mention

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of Bertha was with no more than the usual spice of village scandal, tolerant and unresentful.

Of all this Tom was aware chiefly through the observations of Blanche, the colored woman who came in by the day to do the housework.

“Law, Mr. Tom, yo’ pappa don’t need to feel so bad. Nobody in this yere town what blame him, not a little mite. Po’ Mis’ Quidmo’, nobody couldn’t please her nohow. Don’t I know? Ain’t I wash her, and iron her, and do her housecleanin’, ever since she come to this yere community, and Mr. Quidmo’ he buy this yere lot off old Aaron Bidbury? No, suh! Nobody can’t tell me! Them there giddy things what nobody can’t please ’em they can’t please their-selves, and some day they go to work and do somefin’ despe’ate, just like po’ Mis’ Quidmo’. A little cup o’ tea, she take. No mo’n that. See, boy! I keep that there brown teapot, what look as innocent as a baby, all the time incriminated to her memo’y.”

Nevertheless, Tom found his father obsessed by fear, with nothing to be afraid of. The obsession had shown itself as soon as they entered the house on their return from Harfrey. He was afraid of the house, afraid of the kitchen especially. When Gimlets barked he jumped, cursing the dog for its noise. When a buggy drove up to the door he peeped out at the occupant before showing himself to the neighbor coming to offer his condolences. If the telephone rang Tom hastened to answer it, knowing that it set his father shivering.

As evening deepened on that first Wednesday, they kept out of doors as late as possible, the boy chatter-

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ing to the best of his ability. When obliged to go in, Quidmore tried to say with solicitude on Tom's behalf:

"Expect you'll be lonesome now with only the two of us in the house. Better come and sleep in the other bed in my room."

The boy was about to reply that he was not lonesome, and preferred his own bed, when he caught the dread behind the invitation.

"All right, dad, I'll come. Sleep there every night. Then I won't be scared."

About two in the morning Tom was wakened by a shout. "Hell! Hell! Hell!"

Jumping from his own bed, he ran to the other. "Wake up, dad! Wake up!"

Quidmore woke, confused and trembling. "Wha' matter?" His senses returning, he spoke more distinctly. "Must have had a nightmare. God! Turn on the light. Hate bein' in the dark. Now get back to bed. All right again."

The next day both were picking strawberries. It was not Quidmore's custom to pick strawberries, but he seemed to prefer a task at which he could crouch, and be more or less out of sight. Happening to glance up, he saw a stranger coming round the duck pond.

"Who's that?" he snapped, in terror.

Tom ran to the stranger, interviewed him, and ran back again. "It's an agent for a new kind of fertilizer."

"Tell him I don't want it and to get to hell out of this."

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“You’d better see him. He’ll think it queer if you don’t.”

It was the spur he needed. He couldn’t afford to be thought queer. He saw the agent, Tom acting as go-between and interpreter.

To act as go-between and interpreter became in a measure the boy’s job. Being so near the holidays, he did not return to school, and freed from school, he could give all his time to helping the frightened creature to seem competent in the eyes of his customers and hired men. Not that he succeeded. None knew better than the hired men that the place was, as they put it, all in the soup; none wereso quick to fall away as customers who were not getting what they wanted. When the house was tumbling about their heads one little boy’s shoulder could not do much as a prop; but what it could do he offered.

He offered it with a gravity at which the men laughed good-naturedly behind his back. They took his orders solemnly, and thought no more about them. For a whole week nothing went to market. The dealers whom they supplied complained by telephone. Billy Peet and himself got a load of “truck” into town, only to be told that their man had made other arrangements. To meet these conditions Quidmore had spurts of energy, from which he backed down gibbering.

Taking his courage in both hands, the boy went to see Bertha. Never having been face to face with her before, he found her of the type of beauty best appreciated where the taste is for the highly blown. She received him with haughty surprise and wonder, not

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asking him to sit down. Having prepared his words, he recited them, though her attitude frightened him out of the man-of-the-world tone he had meant to adopt. Humbly and haltingly, he asked if she wouldn't come out and help to stiffen the old man.

"So he's sent you, has he? Well, you can go back and say that I've no reply except the one I've given him. All is over between us. Tell him that if he thinks that *that* was the way to win me he's very gravely mistook. I know what's happened as positive as if I was a jury, and I shall never pardon it. Silence I shall keep, but that is all he can ask of me. He's made me talked about when he shouldn't ought to ov, ignoring that a woman, and especially a widow—" her voice broke—"has nothing but her reputation. Go back and tell him that if he tries to force my door he'll find it double-barred against him."

Tom went back but said nothing. There was no need for him to say anything, since his life began at once to take another turn.

School holidays having begun, he was free in fact as well as in name. It was on a Thursday that his father came to him with the kind of proposal which always excites a small boy.

"Say, boy, what you think of a little trip down to Wilmington, Delaware, you and me? Go off tomorrow and get back by Tuesday. I'd see my sister, and it'd do me good."

The prospect seemed to have done him good already. A new life had come to him. He went about the place giving orders for the few days of his absence, with particular instructions to Diggory and

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Blanche as to Geraldine, and the disposal of the milk. They started on their journey in the morning.

It was one of those mornings in June when every blessed and beautiful thing seems poured on the earth at once. As between five and six Billy Peet drove them over to take the train at Harfrey, light, birds, trees, flowers, meadows, dew, would have thrilled them to ecstasy if they had not been used to them. For the first time in weeks Tom saw his father smile. It was a smile of relief rather than of pleasure, but it was better than his look of woe.

The journey wakened memories. Not since Mrs. Crewdson had brought him out to place him as a State ward with Mrs. Tollivant had he gone into the city by this route. He had gone in by the motor truck often enough; but this line that followed the river was haunted still by the things he had outlived. He was not sorry to have known them, though glad that they were gone. He was hardly sorry even for the present, though doubtful as to how it was going to turn out. Vaguely and not introspectively, he was shocked at himself, that he should be sitting there with a man who had done what he felt pretty sure this man had done, and that he should feel no horror. But he felt none. He assured himself of that. He could sleep with him by night, and work and eat with him by day, with no impulse but to shield a poor wretch who had made his own life such a misery.

"I've got to do it," he said to himself, in a kind of self-defense. "I don't *know* he did it—not for sure, I don't. And if nobody else tries to find out, why should I, when he's been so awful nice to me?"

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He watched a steamer plowing her way southward in the middle of the stream. He liked her air of quiet self-possession and of power. He wondered whence she was coming, whither she was going, and what she was doing it for. He couldn't guess.

"That'd be like me," he said, silently, "sailing from I don't know where—sailing *to* I don't know where——"

Ten years later he finished this thought, repeating exactly the same words. Just now he couldn't finish anything, because there was so much to see. Little towns perched above little harbors. Fishermen angled from little piers. A group of naked boys, shameless as young mermen, played in the water. On a rock a few yards from the shore a flock of gulls jostled each other for standing room. A motor boat puffed. Yachts rode sleepily at anchor. The car which, when they took it at Harfrey had been almost empty, was beginning to fill with the earlier hordes of commuters. Soon it was quite full. Soon there were cheery young people, most of them chewing gum, standing in the passageway. Having rounded the curve at Spuyten Duyvil, they saw the city looming up, white, spiritual, tremulous, through the morning mist.

Up to this minute he had not thought of plans; now he began to wonder what they should do on reaching the Grand Central, where they would arrive in another quarter of an hour.

"Do we go straight across to the Pennsylvania Station, to take the train for Wilmington, or do we have to wait?"

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"I'll—I'll see."

The answer was unsatisfactory. He looked at his father inquiringly. Looking at him, he was hurt to observe that his confidence was departing, that he was again like something with a broken spring.

"Well, we're going to Wilmington to-day, aren't we?"

"I'll—I'll see."

"But," the boy cried in alarm, "where can we go, if we don't?"

"I—I know a place."

It was disappointing. The choking sensation which, when he was younger, used to precede tears, began to gather in his throat. Having heard so much from Mrs. Quidmore of the glories of Wilmington, Delaware, he saw it as a city of palaces, of exquisite, ladylike maidens, of noble youths, of aristocratic joyousness. Moreover, he had been told that to get there you went under the river, through a tunnel so deep down in the earth that you felt a distressful throbbing in the head. The postponement of these experiences even for a day was hard to submit to.

In the Grand Central his father was in a mood he had never before seen. It was a dark mood, at once decided and secretive.

"Come this way."

This way was out into Forty-second Street. With their suitcases in their hands, they climbed into a street car going westward. Westward they went, changing to another car going southward, under the thunder of the elevated, in Ninth Avenue. At Fourteenth Street they got out again. Tom recognized the neighbor-

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hood because of its nearness to the great markets to which they sometimes brought supplies. But they avoided the markets, making their way between drays, round buildings in course of demolition, through gangs of children wooing disaster as they played in the streets. In the end they turned out of the tumult to find themselves in a placid little backwater of the "old New York" of the early nineteenth century. Reading the sign at the corner Tom saw that it was Jane Street.

Jane Street dates from a period earlier than the development of that civic taste which gives to all New York north of Fourteenth Street the picturesqueness of a sum in simple arithmetic. Jane Street has atmosphere, period, chic. You know at a glance that the people who built these trim little red-brick houses still felt that impulse which first came to Manhattan from The Hague, to be fostered later by William and Mary, and finally merged in the Georgian tradition. Jane Street is Dutch. It has Dutch quaintness, and, as far as New York will permit it, Dutch cleanliness. It might be a byway in Amsterdam. Instead of cutting straight from the Hudson River Docks to Greenwich Avenue, it might run from a canal with barges on it to a field of hyacinths in bloom.

But Tom Quidmore saw not what you and I would have seen, a relief from the noise and fetidness of a hot summer's morning in a neighborhood reeking with garbage. When his heart had been fixed on that dream-city, Wilmington, Delaware, he found himself in a dingy little alley. Not often querulous, he became so now.

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“What are we doing down here?”

The reply startled him. “I’m—I’m sick.”

Looking again at the man who shuffled along beside him, he saw that his face had grown ashy, while his eyes, which earlier in the day had had life in them, were lusterless. The boy would have been frightened had it not been for the impulse of affection.

“Let’s go back to Bere. Then you can have the doctor. I’ll get a cab and steer the whole business.”

Without answering, Quidmore stopped at a brown door, level with the pavement, in a big, dim-windowed building, with fire escapes zigzagging down the front. Jane Street is not exclusively clean and trim and Dutch. It has lapses—here a warehouse, there a dwelling tumbling to decay, elsewhere a nondescript structure like this. It looked like a lodging house for sailors and dock laborers. In the basement was a restaurant to which you went down by steps, and bearing the legend Pappa’s Chop Saloon.

While Quidmore stood in doubt as to whether to ring the bell or to push the door which already stood a little open, two men came out of the Chop Saloon and began to mount the steps. In faded blue overalls the worse for wear, they had plainly broken a day’s work, possibly begun at five o’clock, for a late breakfast. The one in advance, a sturdy, well-knit fellow of forty or forty-five, got a sinister expression from a black patch over his left eye. His companion was older, smaller, more worn by a bitter life. All the twists in his figure, all the soured betrayals in his crafty face, showed you the habitual criminal.

None of these details was visible to Quidmore,

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because his imagination could see only the bed for which he was craving. To the boy, who trusted everyone, they were no more than the common type of workman he was used to meeting in the markets. The fellow with the patch on his eye, making an estimate of the strangers as he mounted the steps, spoke cheerily.

“I say, mate, what can I do for yer?”

The voice with a vaguely English ring was not ungenial. Not ungenial, when you looked at it, was the strongly-boned face, with a ruddiness burnt to a coarse tan. The single gray-blue eye had the sympathetic gleam which often helps roguery to make itself excusable to people with a sense of fun.

Quidmore muttered something about wanting to see Mrs. Pappa.

“Right you are! Come along o’ me. I’ll dig the old gal out for yer. Expects you wants a room for yerself and the kid. Hi, Pappa!”

Pappa came out of a dim, musty parlor as the witch who foretells bad weather appears in a mechanical barometer. She was like a witch, but a dark, classic witch, with an immemorial tradition behind her. Her ancestors might have fought at Marathon, or sacrificed to Neptune in the temple on Sunium. In Jane Street she was archaic, a survival from antiquity. Her thoughts must have been with the nymphs at Delphi, or following the triremes carrying the warriors from Argolis to Troy, as silent, mysterious, fateful, she led the way upstairs.

They followed in procession, all four of them. The doorstep acquaintances displayed a solicitude not less

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than brotherly. The hall was without furniture, the stairs without carpet. The softwood floors, like the treads of the stairs, were splintered with the usage of many heavy heels. Where the walls bulged, through the pressure of jerry-built stories overhead, the marbled paper swelled into bosses. Tom found it impressive, with something of strange stateliness.

"Yer'll be from the country," the one-eyed fellow observed, as they climbed upward.

"Yes, sir," Tom answered, civilly. "We're on our way to Wilmington, Delaware, but my father felt a little sick."

"Well, he's struck a good place to lay up in. I say, Pappa," he called ahead, "seems to me as the big room with two beds 'd be what'd suit the gent. It's next door to the barthroom, and he'll find that convenient. Mate," he explained further, when they stood within the room with two beds, "this'll set ye' back a dollar a day in advance. That right, Pappa, ain't it?"

Pappa assenting with some antique sign, Quidmore drew out his pocketbook to extract the dollar. With no ceremonious scruples the smaller comrade craned his neck to appraise, as far as possible, the contents of the wallet.

"Wad," Tom heard him squirt out of the corner of his mouth, in the whisper of a ventriloquist.

His friend seemed to wink behind the patch on his left eye. Tom took the exchange of confidence as a token of respect. He and his father were considered rich, the effect being seen in the attentions accorded them. This was further borne out when the genial

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one of the two rogues turned on the threshold, as his colleague was following Pappa downstairs.

“Anythink I can do for yer, mate, command me. Name of Honeybun—Lemuel Honeybun. Honey Lem some of the guys calls me. I answers to it, not takin’ no offense like.” He pointed to the figure stumping down the stairs. “My friend, Mr. Goodsir. Him and me been pals this two year. We lives on the ground floor. Room back of Pappa.”

The door closed, Tom looked round him in an interest which eclipsed his hopes of the tunnel. This was adventure. It was nearly romance. Never before had he stayed in a hotel. The place was not luxurious, but never, in the life he could remember, having known anything but necessity, necessity was enough. Moreover, the room contained a work of art that touched his imagination. On the bare drab mantelpiece stood the head of a Red Indian, in plaster painted in bronze, not unlike the mummified head of Rameses the Great. The boy couldn’t take his eye away from it. This was what you got by visiting strange cities more intimately than by trucking to and from the markets.

Quidmore threw himself on his bed, his face buried in the meager pillow. He was suffering apparently not from pain, but from some more subtle form of distress. Being told that there was nothing he could do for the invalid, Tom sat silent and still on one of the two small chairs which helped out the furnishings. It was not boring for him to do this, because he swam in novelty. He recalled the steamer he had seen that morning, sailing from he didn’t know where,

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sailing *to* he didn't know where, but on the way. He, too, was on the way. He was on the way to something different from Wilmington, Delaware. It would be different from Bere. He began to wonder if he should ever go back to Bere. If he didn't go back to Bere . . . but at this point in Tom's dreams Quidmore dragged himself off the bed.

"Let's go down to the chop saloon, and eat."

XVIII

HE was not too ill to eat, but too ill when not eating to stay anywhere but on his bed. He went back to it again, lying with his face buried in the pillow as before. The boy resumed his patient sitting. He would have been bored with it now, had he not had his dreams.

All the same, it was a relief when about four o'clock, just as the westering sun was beginning to wake the Red Indian to an horrific life, Mr. Honeybun, pushing the door ajar softly, peeped in with his good eye.

"I say, mate!" he whispered, "wouldn't you like me to take the young gent for a bit of a walk like? Do him good, and him a-mopin' here all by hisself."

The walk meant Tom's initiation into the life of cities as that life is led. Not that it went very far, but as far as it went it was a revelation. It took him from one end of Jane Street to the other, along the docks of the Cunard and other great lines, and as far as Eighth Avenue in the broad, exciting thoroughfare of Fourteenth Street. New York as he had seen it hitherto, from the front seat of a motor truck, had been little more entertaining than a map. Besides, he was only developing a taste for this sort of entertainment. Games, school, scraps with other boys, had been enough for him. Now he was waking

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to an interest in places as places, in men as men, in differences of attitude to the drama known as life. In Mr. Honeybun's attitude he grew interested especially.

"I don't believe that nothink don't belong to no one," Tom's guide observed, as the wealth of the city spread itself more splendidly. "Things is common proputtly. Yer takes what yer can put yer 'and on."

"But wouldn't you be arrested?"

"Yer'd be arrested if yer didn't look out; but what's bein' arrested? No more'n the measures what a lot of poor, frightened, silly boobs'll take agin the strong man what makes 'em tremble. At least," he added, as an afterthought, "not when yer conscience is clear, it ain't."

Fascinated by this bold facing of society, Tom ventured on a question. "Have you ever been arrested, Mr. Honeybun?"

Mr. Honeybun straightened himself to the martyr's pose. "Oh, if yer puts it that way, I've suffered for my opinions. That much I'll admit. I'm—" he brought out the statement proudly—"I'm one o' them there socialists. You know what a socialist is, don't yer?"

Tom was not sure that he did.

"A socialist is one o' them fellers who whatever he sees knows it belongs to him if he can get ahold of it. It's gettin' ahold of it what counts. Now if you was to have somethink I wanted locked up in yer 'ouse, let us say, and I was to make my way in so as I could take it—why, then it'd be mine. That's the law o' Gord, I believes; and I tries to live up to it."

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Enjoying a frankness which widened his horizon, Tom was nevertheless perplexed by it. "But wouldn't that be something like burglary?"

"Burglary is what them may call it what ain't socialists; but it don't do to hang a dog because yer've give him a bad name. A lot o' good people's been condemned that way. When I'm in court I always appeals to justice."

"And do you get it?"

"I get men's. I don't get Gord's. You see that apple?" They stopped before a window in Horatio Street where apples were displayed. "Now, do yer suppose that apple growed itself for any one man in partic'lar? No! That apple didn't know nothink about men's laws when it blossomed on a apple tree. It just give itself generallike to the human race. If you was to go in and collar that big red one, and git away with it, it'd be yours. Stands to reason it'd be Gord's law! But if that there policeman, a-squintin' his ugly eye at us this minute—he knows Honey Lem, he does!—was to pull yer in, yer might git thirty days. Man's law! And I'll leave it to you which is best worth sufferin' for."

In this philosophy of life there was something Tom found reasonable, and something in which he felt a flaw without being able to detect it. He chased it round and round in his thoughts as he sat through the long dull hours with his father. It passed the time; it helped him to the habit of thinking things out for himself. His mind being clear, and his intuitions acute, he could generally solve a problem not beyond his years. When, on the morrow, they walked in the

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cool of the day down the length of Hudson Street till it ends in Reade Street, Tom brought the subject up from another point of view.

“But, Mr. Honeybun, suppose someone took something from you? What then?”

“He’d git it in the nut,” the socialist answered, tersely. “Not if there’d be two of ’em,” he added, in amendment. “If there’s two I don’t contend. I ain’t a communist.”

“Is that what a communist is, a fellow who’ll contend with two?”

“A communist is a socialist what’ll use weepsons. If there’s somethink what he thinks is his in anybody’s ’ouse, he’ll go armed, and use vi’lence. They never got that on me. I never ’urt nobody, except onst I hits a footman, what was goin’ to grab me, a wee little knock on the ’ead with a silver soup ladle I ’ad in me ’and and lays ’im out flat. Didn’t do him no ’arm, not ’ardly any. That was in England. But them days is over, since I lost my eye. Makes yer awful easy spotted when yer’ve lost a eye.”

“How did you lose it, Mr. Honeybun?”

“I lost it a-savin’ of the life of a beautiful young lady. ’Twas quite a tale.” The boy looked up expectantly while his friend thought out the details. “I was footin’ it onst from New Haven to New York, and I’d got to a pretty little town as they call Old Lyme. Yer see, I’d been doin’ a bit o’ time at New Haven—awful ’ard on socialists they was in New Haven in them days—and when I gits out I was a bit stoney-broke till I’d picked up somethink else. Well there I was, trampin’ it through Old Lyme, and I’d

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got near to the bridge what crosses the river they've got there—the Connecticut I think it is—and what should I see but a 'orse what a young lady was drivin' come over the bridge like mad. The young lady she was tuggin' at the reins and a-hollerin' like blazes for some one to save her life. I ain't no 'ero, kid. Don't go for to think that I'm a-sayin' that I am. But what's a man to do when he sees a beautiful young lady in danger o' bein' killed?" He paused to take the bodily postures with which he stopped the runaway. "And the tip of the shaft," he ended, "it took me right in the eye, and put it out. But, Lord, what's a eye, even to a Socialist, when yer can do somethink for a feller creeter?"

Tom gaped in admiration. "I suppose it hurt awful."

"Was in 'orspital three months," the hero said, quietly. "Young lady, she visits me reg'lar, calls me her life-saver, and every name like that, and kind o' clings to me. But, Lord, marriage ain't never been much of a fancy to me. Ties a man up, and I likes to be free, except when I'm sufferin' for socialism. Besides, if I was to marry every woman what I've saved their lives I'd be one o' them Normans by this time. When yer wants company a good pal 'll be faithfuller than a wife, and nag yer a lot less."

"Mr. Goodsir's your pal, ain't he, Mr. Honeybun?"

"Yes, and I'm sick of him. He don't develop. He ain't got no eddication. Yer can see for yerself he don't talk correct. That's what I've took to in yer gov'nor and you, yer gentleman way o' speakin'. Only yer needn't go for to tell yer old man all what I've

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been a-gassin' of to you. I can see he's what they call conservative. He wouldn't understand. You're the younger generation, mind more open like. You and me'd make a great team if we was ever to work together."

With memories of his mother in his mind, Tom answered sturdily, "I wouldn't be a socialist, not for anything you could offer me."

They left it at that. Mr. Honeybun was content to point out the historic sites known to him as they turned homeward. There was the house where a murder had been committed; the store where a big break had been pulled off; a private detective's residence.

"Might go out agin some day, if yer pop don't mind it," he suggested, when they had reached their own hallway. "I gits the time in the late afternoon. Yer see, our job at the market begins early and ends early, and lately—" there was a wistful note—"well, I feels kind o' fed up with the low company Goodsir keeps. Every kind o' joint and dive and—and—Chinamen—and—" Out of respect for the boy he held up the description. "You'd 'ardly believe it, but an innercent little walk like what we've just took, why, it'll do me as much good as a swig o' water when you wake up about three in the mornin', with yer tongue 'angin' out like a leather strap, after a three-days' spree."

Unable to get the full force of this figure, Tom thanked his guide politely, and was bounding up the stairs two steps at a time, when the man who stood watching him spoke again.

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“If I’d ever a-thought that I’d ’a had a kid like you, it’d ’a’ been pretty near worth gittin’ married for.”

Tom could only turn with one of those grins which showed his teeth, making his eyes twinkle with a clear blue light, when adequate words for kindness wouldn’t come to him.

XIX

THE days settled into a routine. When they rose in the morning a colored woman "did" their room while they went down to the chop saloon for breakfast. Returning, Quidmore threw himself on his bed again. He did this after each meal, poking his nose deep into the limp pillow. Hardly ever speaking, he now and then uttered a low moan.

Tom watched patiently, ready to tell him the time or bring him a drink of water. When the day grew too hot he fanned him with an old newspaper.

"Why don't we go home, dad?" he asked anxiously on the third day. "I could get you there as easy as anything."

"I'm not well enough."

"You don't seem very sick to me. You don't have any pain and you can eat all right."

"It isn't that kind of bein' sick. It's—" he sought for a name—"it's like nervous prostration."

More nearly than he knew he had named his malady. In his own words, he was all in; and he was all in to the end of the letter of the term. Of that moral force which is most of what any man has to live upon some experience had drained him. He had spent his gift of vitality. All in was precisely the phrase to apply to him. He had cashed the last cent of whatever he had inherited or saved in the way of inner strength, and now he could not go on.

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“What’s the good of it anyhow?” he asked of Tom in the night. “There’s nothin’ to it, not when you come to think of it. You run after something as if you couldn’t live without it; and then when you get it you curse your God that you ever run.”

Tom shuddered in his bed, but he was used to doing that. There was hardly a night when he was not wakened by a nightmare. If it was not by a nightmare, it was by the soft complaining voice.

“Are you awake, Tom?”

“Yes, dad. Can I get you anything?”

“No; I only wanted to know if you was awake.”

Tom kept awake as long as he could, because he knew the poor wretch was afraid of lying sleepless in the dark. To keep him awake, perhaps for less selfish reasons, too, the soft voice would take this opportunity of giving him advice.

“Don’t you ever go to wanting anything too much, boy. That’s what’s done for me. You can want things if you like; but one of the tricks in the game is to know how to be disappointed. I never did know, not even when I was a little chap. If I cried for the moon I wouldn’t stop till I got it. When I was about as old as you, not gettin’ what I wanted made me throw a fit. If I couldn’t get things by fair means I had to get ’em by foul; but I got ’em. It don’t do you no good, boy. If I could go back again over the last six months . . .”

For fear of a confession Tom stopped his ears, but no confession ever came. The tortured soul could dribble its betrayals, but it couldn’t face itself squarely.

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“Look out for women,” he said, gently, on another night. “You’re old enough now to know how they’ll play the Dutch with you. When I was your age there was nothing I didn’t understand, and I guess it’s the same with you. Don’t ever let ’em get you. They got me before I was—well, I don’t hardly know what age I was, but it was pretty young. Look out for ’em, boy. If you ever damn your soul for one of ’em, she’ll do you dirt in the end. If it hadn’t been for her . . .”

To keep this from going further, the boy broke in with the first subject he could think of. “I wonder if they’ll remember to pick the new peas. They’ll be ready by this time. Do you suppose they’ll . . . ?”

“I don’t care a hang what they do.” After a brief silence he continued: “I’d ’a left the place to you, boy, only my brother-in-law, my sister’s husband, has a mortgage on the place that’d eat up most of the value, so I’ve left it to her. That’ll fix ’em both. I wish I could ’a done more for you.”

“You’ve done a lot for me, as it is.”

“You don’t know.”

There was another silence. It might have lasted ten minutes. The boy was falling once more into a doze when the soft voice lisped again,

“Tom.”

He did his best to drag himself back from sleep. “Yes, dad? Do you want to know what time it is? I’ll get up and look.”

“No, stay where you are. There’s somethin’ I want to say. I’ve been a skunk to you.”

“Oh, cut it, dad . . .”

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"I won't cut it. I want to say it out. When I—when I first took you, it wasn't—it wasn't so much that I'd took a fancy to you . . ."

"I know it wasn't, dad. You wanted a boy to pick the berries. Let's drop it there."

But the fevered conscience couldn't drop it there. "Yes; at first. And then—and then it come into my mind that you might be—might be the one that'd do somethin' I didn't want to do myself. I thought—I thought that if you done it we might get by on it. We got by on it all right—or up to now we've got by—but I didn't get real fond of you till—till . . ."

"Oh, dad, let's go to sleep."

"All right. Let's. I just wanted to say that much. I was glad afterward that . . ."

The boy breathed heavily, pretending that he was asleep. He was soon asleep in earnest, and for the rest of the night was undisturbed. In the morning his father didn't get up, and Tom went down to the chop saloon to bring up something that would serve as breakfast. He did the same at midday, and the same in the evening. It was a summer's evening, with a long twilight. As it began to grow dark Quidmore seemed to rouse himself. He needed tooth paste, shaving cream, other small necessities. Sitting up on the bed, he made out a list of things, giving Tom the money with which to pay for them. If he went to the pharmacy in Hudson Street he would be back in half an hour.

"All right, dad. I know the way. I'm an old hand in New York by this time."

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He was at the door when Quidmore called him back.

“Say, boy. Give us a kiss.”

Tom was stupefied. He had kissed his adopted mother often enough, but he had never been asked to do this. Quidmore laughed, pulling him close.

“Ah, come along! I don’t ask you often. You’re a fine boy, Tom. You must know as well as I do what’s been . . .”

The words were suspended by a hug; but once he was free Tom fled away like a small young wild thing, released from human hands. Having reached the street, he began to feel frightened, prescient, awed. Something was going to happen, he could not imagine what. He made his purchases hurriedly, and then delayed his return. He could be tender with the man; he could be loving; but he couldn’t share his secrets.

But he had to go back. In the dim upper hall outside the door he paused to pump up courage to go in. He was not afraid in the common way of fear; he was only overcome with apprehension at having a knowledge he rejected forced on him.

The first thing he noticed was that no light came through the crack beneath the door. The room was apparently dark. That was strange because his father dreaded darkness, except when he was there to keep him company. He crept to the door and listened. There was no sound. He pushed the door open. The lights were out. In panic at what he might discover, he switched on the electricity.

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But he only found the room empty. That was so far a relief. His father had gone out, and would be back again. Closing the door behind him, he advanced into the room.

It seemed more than empty. It felt abandoned, as if something had gone which would not return. He remembered that sensation afterward. He stood still to wonder, to conjecture. The Red Indian gleamed with his bronze leer.

The next thing the boy noticed was an odd little pile on the table. It was money—notes. On top of the notes there was silver and copper. He stooped over them, touching them with his forefinger, pushing them. He pushed them as he might have pushed an insect to see whether or not it was alive.

Lastly he noticed a paper, on which the money had been placed. There was something scribbled on it with a pencil. He held it under the dim lamp. "For Tom—with a real love."

The tears gushed to his eyes, as they always did when people showed that they loved him. But he didn't actually cry; he only stood still and wondered. He couldn't make it out. That his father should have gone out and forgotten all his money was unusual enough, but that he should have left these penciled words was puzzling. It was easy to count the money. There were seven fifty-dollar bills, with twenty-eight dollars and fifty-four cents in smaller bills and change. He seemed to remember that his father had drawn four hundred dollars for the Wilmington expenses, with a margin for purchases.

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He stood wondering. He could never recall how long he stood wondering. The rest of the night became more or less a blank to him; for, to the best of the boy's knowledge, the man who had adopted him was never seen again.

XX

TO the best of the boy's knowledge the man who had adopted him was never seen again; but it took some time to assume the fact that he was dead. Visitors to New York often dived below the surface, to come up again a week or ten days later. Their experience in these absences they were not always eager to discuss.

"Why, I've knowed 'em to stay away that long as yer'd swear they'd been kidnaped," Mr. Honeybun informed the boy. "He's on a little time; that's all. Nothink but nat'el to a man of his age—and a widower—livin' in the country—when he gits a bit of freedom in the city."

"Yes, but what'll he do for money?"

There was this point of view, to be sure. Mr. Goodsir suggested that Quidmore had had more money still, that he had only left this sum to cover Tom's expenses while he was away.

"And listen, son," he continued, kindly, "that's a terr'ble big wad for a boy like you to wear on his person. Why, there's guys that free-quents this very house that'd rob and murder you for half as much, and never drop a tear. Now here I am, an old trusty man, accustomed to handle funds, and not sneak nothin' for myself. If I could be of any use to you in takin' charge of it like . . ."

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“Me and you’ll talk this over, later,” Mr. Honeybun intervened, tactfully. “The kid don’t need no one to take care of his cash when his father may skin home again before tonight. Let’s wait a bit. If he’s goin’ to trust anybody it’ll be us, his next of kin in this ’ere ’ouse, of course. That’d be so, kiddy, wouldn’t it?”

Tom replied that it would be so, giving them to understand that he counted on their good offices. For the present he was keeping himself in the non-committal attitude natural to suspense.

“You see,” he explained, looking from one to another, with his engaging candor, “I can’t do anything but just wait and see if he’s coming back again, at any rate, not for a spell.”

The worthies going to their work, the interview ended. At least, Mr. Goodsir went to his work, though within a few minutes Mr. Honeybun was back in Tom’s room again.

“Say, kid; don’t you let them three hundred bucks out’n yer own ’and. I can’t stop now; but when I blow in to eat at noon I’ll tell yer what I’d do with ’em, if you was me. Keep ’em buttoned up in yer inside pocket; and don’t ’ang round in this old hut any more’n you can help till I come back and git you. Yer never knows who’s on the same floor with yer; but out in the street yer’ll be safe.”

Out in the street he kept to the more populous thoroughfares, coasting the line of docks especially. He liked them. On the façades of the low buildings he could read names which distilled romance into syllables—New Orleans, Savannah, Galveston, Texas,

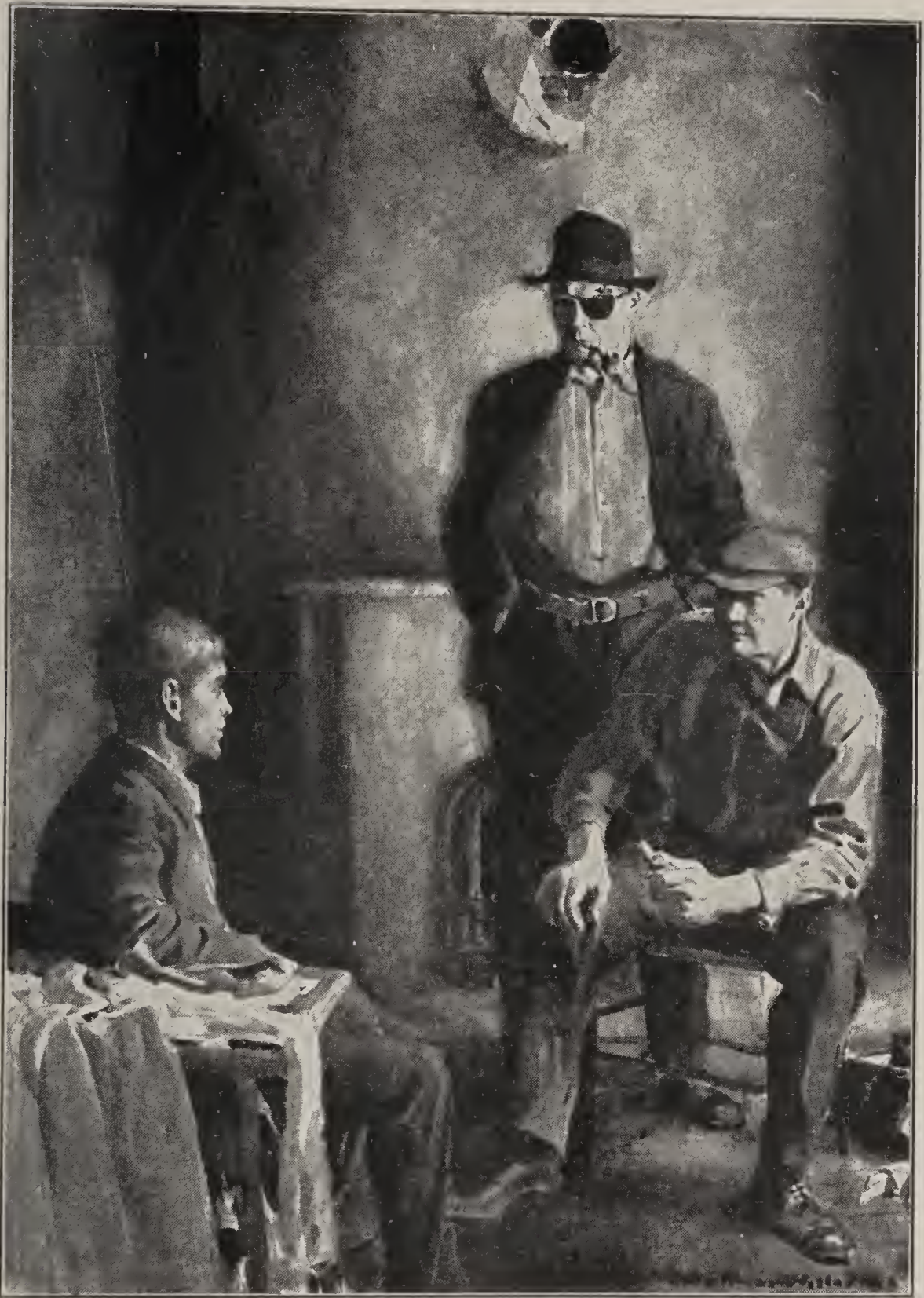
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Arizona, Oklahoma. He had always been fond of geography. It opened up the world. It told of countries and cities he would one day visit, and which in the meantime he could dream about. Over the low roofs of the dock buildings he could see the tops of funnels. Here and there was the long black flank of a steamer at its pier. There were flags flying from one masthead or another, while exotic seafaring types slipped in and out amid the crush of vehicles, or dodged the freight train aimlessly shunting up and down. The movement and color, the rumble of deep sound, the confused world-wide purpose of it all, the knowledge that he himself was so insignificant a figure that no robber or murderer would suspect that he had all that money buttoned against his breast, dulled his mind to his desolation.

He tried to keep moving so as to make it seem to a suspicious populace that he was an errand boy; but now and then the sense of his loneliness smote him to a standstill. He would wonder where he was going, and what he was going for, as he wondered the same thing about the steamer on the Hudson. Like her, he seemed to be afloat. She, of course, had her destination; but he had nothing in the world to tie up to. He seemed to have heard of a ship that was always sailing—sailing—sailing—sailing—with never a port to have come out of, and never a port in view,

The Church of the Sea!

He read the words on the corner of a big white building where Jane Street flows toward the docks. He read them again. He read them because he liked



"THAT'S A TERR'BLE BIG WAD FOR A BOY LIKE YOU TO WEAR"

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their suggestions—immensity, solitude, danger perhaps, and God!

It was queer to think of God being out there, where there were only waves and ships and sailors, but chiefly waves and a few seabirds. It recalled the religion of crippled Bertie Tollivant, the cynic. To the instructed like himself, God was in the churches that had steeples and pews and strawberry sociables, or in the parlors where they held family prayers. They told you that He was everywhere; but that only meant that you couldn't do wrong, you couldn't swear, or smoke a cigarette, or upset some householder's ash-barrels, without His spotting you. Tom Quidmore did not believe that Mr. and Mrs. Tollivant would have sanctioned this Church of the Sea, where God was as free as wind, and over you like the sky, and beyond any human power to monopolize or give away. It made Him too close at hand, too easy to find, and probably much too tender toward sailors, who were often drunk, and homeless little boys. He turned away from the Church of the Sea, secretly envying Bertie Tollivant his graceless creed, but not daring to question the wisdom of adult men and women.

By the steps of the chop saloon he waited for Mr. Honeybun, who came swinging along, a strong and supple figure, a little after the whistle blew at twelve. To the boy's imagination, now that he had been informed as to his friend's status, he looked like what had been defined to him as a socialist. That is, he had the sort of sinuosity that could slip through half-open windows, or wriggle in at coal-holes, or glide

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noiselessly up and down staircases. It was ridiculous to say it of one so bony and powerful, but the spring of his step was spiritlike.

“Good for you, lad, to be waitin’! We’ll go right along and do it, and then it’ll be off our minds.”

What “it” was to be, Tom had no idea. But then he had no suspicions. In spite of his hard childhood, it did not occur to him that grown-up men would do him wrong. He had no fear of Mr. Honeybun, and no mistrust, not any more than a baby in arms has fear or mistrust of its nurse.

“And there’s another thing,” Mr. Honeybun brought up, as they went along. “It don’t seem to me no good for a husky boy like you to be just doin’ nothink, even while he’s waitin’ for his pop. I’d git a job, if you was me.”

The boy said that he would gladly have a job, but didn’t know how to get one.

“I’ve got one for yer if yer’ll take it. Work not too ’ard, and ’ll bring you in a dollar and a ’alf a day.”

But “it” was the matter in hand, and presently its nature became evident. At the corner of Fourteenth Street and Eighth Avenue Mr. Honeybun pointed across to a handsome white-stone building, whose very solidity inspired confidence. Tom could read for himself that it was a savings bank.

“Now what I’d do if it was my wad is this. I’d put three hundred and twenty-five of it in that there bank, which’d leave yer more’n twenty-five for yer eddication. But yer principal, no one won’t be able

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to touch it but yerself, and twice a year yer'll be gettin' yer interest piled up on top of it."

Tom's heart leaped. He had long meditated on savings banks. They had been part of his queer vision. To become "something big" he would have to begin by opening some such account as this. With Mr. Honeybun's proposal he felt as if he had suddenly grown taller by some inches, and older by some years.

"You'll come over with me, won't you?"

Mr. Honeybun demurred. "Well, yer see, kid, I'm a pretty remarkable character in this neighborhood. There's lots knows Honey Lem; and if they was to see me go in with you they might think as yer hadn't come by your dough quite hon—I mean, accordin' to yer conscience—or they might be bad enough to suppose as there was a put-up job between us. When I puts a few dollars into my own savings bank—I'm a savin' bird, I am—I goes right over to Brooklyn, where there ain't no wicked mind to suspeck me. So go in by yerself, and say yer wants to open a account. If anyone asks yer, tell him just how the money come to yer, and I don't believe as yer'll run no chanst of no one not believin' yer."

So it was done. Tom came out of the building with his bank book buttoned into his breast pocket, and a conscious enhancement of life.

"And now," Mr. Honeybun suggested, "we'll make tracks for Pappa's and eat."

The "check," like the meal, was light, and Mr. Honeybun paid it. Tom protested, since he had

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money of his own, but his host took the situation gracefully.

“Lord love yer, kid, ain’t I yer next o’ kin, as long as yer guv’nor’s away? Who sh’d buy yer a lunch if it wasn’t me?”

Childhood is naturally receptive. As Romulus and Remus took their food from a wolf when there was no one else to give it them, so Tom Quidmore found it not amazing to be nourished, first by a murderer, and then by a thief. It became amazing, a few years later, on looking back on it; but for the moment murderer and thief were not the terms in which he thought of those who had been kind to him.

Not that he didn’t try. He tried that very afternoon. When his next o’ kin had gone back to his job of lifting and heaving in the Gansevoort Market, he returned to the empty room. It was his first return to it alone. When he had gone up from his breakfast in the chop saloon both Goodsir and Honeybun had accompanied him. Now the emptiness was awesome, and a little sinister.

He had slept there the previous night, slept fitfully that is, waking every half hour to listen for the shuffling footstep. He heard other footsteps, dragging, thumping, staggering, but they always passed on to the story above, whence would come a few minutes later the sound of heavy boots thrown on the floor. Now and then there were curses, or male voices raised in a wrangle, or a few bars of a drunken song. During the earlier nights he had slept through these signals of Pappa’s hospitality, or if he had waked, he knew that a grown-up man lay in the other bed, so

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that he was safe. Now he could only lie and shudder, till the sounds died down, and silence implied safety. He did his best to keep awake, so as to unlock the door the instant he heard a knock; but in spite of his efforts he slept.

This return after luncheon brought him for the first time face to face with his state as a reality. There was no one there. It was no use going back to Bere, because there would be no one there. Rather than become again a State ward with the Tollivants, he would sell himself to slavery. What was he to do?

The first thing his eye fell upon was his father's suitcase, lying open on the floor beside the bed, its contents in disorder. It was the way Quidmore kept it, fishing out a shirt or a collar as he needed one. The futility of this clothing was what struck the boy now. The peculiar grief of handling the things intimately used by those who will never use them again was new to him. He had never supposed that so much sorrow could be stored in a soiled handkerchief. Stooping over the suitcase, he had accidentally picked one up, and burst into sudden tears. They were the first he had actually shed since he used to creep away to cry by himself in the heart-lonely life among the Tollivants.

It occurred to him now that he had not cried when his adopted mother disappeared. He had not especially mourned for her. While she had been there, and he was daily face to face with her, he had loved her in the way in which he loved so easily when anyone opened the heart to him; but she had been no part of his inner life. She was the cloud and sunshine

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of a day, to be forgotten in the cloud and a sunshine of the morrow. Of the two, he grieved more for the man; and the man was a murderer, and probably a suicide.

Sitting on the edge of his bed, he used these words in the attempt to work up a fortifying moral indignation. It was then, too, that he called Mr. Honeybun a thief. He must react against these criminal associations. He must stand on his own feet. He was not afraid of earning his own living. He had heard of boys who had done it at an age even earlier than thirteen, and had ended by being millionaires. They had always, however, so far as he knew, had some sort of ties to connect them with the body politic. They had had the support of families, sympathies, and backgrounds. They hadn't been adrift, like that haunting ship which never knew a port, and none but the God of the Sea to keep her from foundering. He could have believed in this God of the Sea. He wished there had been such a God. But the God that was, the God who was shut up in churches and used only on Sundays, was not of much help to him. Any help he got he must find for himself; and the first thing he must do would be to break away from these low-down companionships.

And just as, after two or three hours of meditation, he had reached this conclusion, a tap at the door made him start. Quidmore had come back! But before he could spring to the door it was gently pushed open, and he saw the patch over the left eye.

"Got away early, son. Now, seems to me, we ought to be out after them overalls."

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The boy stood blank. "What overalls?"

"Why, for yer job to-morrow. Yer can't work in them good clo'es. Yer'd sile 'em."

In a second-hand shop, known to Honey Lem, in Charles Street, they found a suit of boy's overalls not too much the worse for wear. Honey Lem pulled out a roll of bills and paid for them.

"But I've got my own money, Mr. Honeybun."

"Dooty o' next o' kin, boy. I ain't doin' it for me own pleasure. Yer'll need yer money for yer eddication. Yer mustn't forgit that."

The overalls bound him more closely to the criminal from whom he was trying to cut loose. More closely still he found himself tied by the scraps of talk he overheard between the former pals that evening. They were on the lowest of the steps leading up from the chop saloon, where all three of them had dined. Tom, who had preceded them, stood on the sidewalk overhead, out of sight and yet within ear-shot.

"I tell yer I can't, Goody," Mr. Honeybun was saying, "not as long as I'm next o' kin to this 'ere kid. 'Twouldn't be fair to a young boy for me to keep no such company."

Mr. Goodsir made some observation the nature of which Tom could only infer from Mr. Honeybun's response.

"Well, don't yer suppose it's a damn sight 'arder for me to be out'n a good thing than it is for you to see me out'n it? I don't go in for no renunciation. But when yer've got a fatherless kid on yer 'ands ye' must cut out a lot o' nice stuff that'll go all right

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when yer've only yerself to think about. Ain't yer a Christian, Goody?"

Once more Mr. Goodsir's response was to Tom a matter of surmise.

"Well, then, Goody, if yer don't like it yer can go to E and double L. What's more, I ain't a-goin' to sleep in our own room to-night, nor any night till that guy comes back. I'm goin' to sleep in the kid's room, and keep him company. 'Tain't right to leave a young boy all by hisself in a 'ouse like this, as full o' toughs as a ward'll be full o' politicians."

Tom removed himself to a discreet distance, but the knowledge that the other bed in his room would not remain so creepily vacant was consciously a relief. He slept dreamlessly that night, because of his feeling of security. In the morning, not long after four, he was wakened by a hand that rocked him gently to and fro.

"Come, little shaver! Time to git up! Got to be on yer job at five."

The job was in a market that was not exactly a market since it supplied only the hotels. Together with the Gansevoort and West Washington Markets, it seemed to make a focal point for much of the food on the continent of America. Railways and steamers brought it from ranches and farms, from plantations and orchards, from rivers and seas, from slaughterstockades and cold-storage warehouses, from the north and the south and the west, from the tropics and farther than the tropics, to feed the vast digestive machine which is the basis of New York's energies. Tom's job was not hard, but it was incessant. His

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was the duty of collecting and arranging the empty cases, crates, baskets, and coops, which were dumped on the raised platform surrounding the building on the outside, or which cluttered the stalls within. Trucks and vans took them away full on one day, and brought them back empty on another. It was all a boy could do to keep them stacked, and in order, according to sizes and shapes. The sizes in the main were small; the shapes were squares and oblongs and diminishing churnlike cylinders. Nimbleness, neatness, and goodwill were the requisites of the task, and all three of them the boy supplied.

Fatigue that night made him wakeful. His companion in the other bed was wakeful too. In talking from bed to bed Tom found it a comfort to be dealing with an easy conscience. Mr. Honeybun had nothing on his mind, nor was he subject to nightmares. Speculation on the subject of Quidmore's disappearance, and possible fate, turned round and round on itself, to begin again with the selfsame guesses.

"And there's another thing," came from Mr. Honeybun. "If he don't come back, why, you'll come in for a good bit o' proputtty, won't yer? Didn't he own that market-garden place, out there on the edge of Connecticut?"

"He left it to his sister. He told me that the other night. You see, I wasn't his real son. I wasn't his son at all till about a year ago."

This statement coming to Mr. Honeybun as something of a shock, Tom was obliged to tell the story of his life to the extent that he knew it. The only details that he touched on lightly were those which

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bore on the manner in which he had lost his "mudda." Even now it was difficult to name her in any other way, because in no other way had he ever named her. Obligated to blur the outlines of his earliest recollections, which in themselves were clear enough, his tale was brief.

"So yer real name is Whitelaw," Mr. Honeybun commented, with interest. "I never hear that name but once. That was the Whitelaw baby. Ye'll have heard tell o' that?"

Since Tom had never heard tell of the Whitelaw baby, the lack in his education was supplied. The Whitelaw baby had been taken out to the Park on a morning in May, and had vanished from its carriage. In the place where it had lain was found a waxen image so true in likeness to the child himself that only when it came time to feed him did the nurse make the discovery that she had wheeled home a replica. The mystery had been the source of nation-wide excitement for the best part of two years. It was talked of even now. It couldn't have been more than three or four years earlier that Mr. Honeybun had seen a daily paper, bearing the headlines that Harry Whitelaw had been found, selling like hotcakes to the women shopping in Twenty-third Street.

"And was he?" Tom asked, beginning at last to be sleepy.

"No more'n a puff of tobacker smoke when yer'd blowed it in the air. The father, a rich banker—a young chap he was, too, I believe—he offers a reward of fifty thousand dollars to anyone as'd put him on the track o' the gang what had kidnapped the young

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'un; and every son of a gun what thought he was a socialist was out to win the money. This 'ere Goody, he had a scheme. Tried to work me in on it, and I don't know but what I might a took a 'and if a chum o' mine hadn't got five year for throwin' the same 'ook without no bait on it. They 'auled in another chap I knowed, what they was sure he had somethink to do with it, and tried to make him squeal; but—" A long breath from Tom interrupted this flow of narrative. "Say, kiddy, yer ain't asleep, are yer? and me tellin' yer about the Whitelaw baby?"

"I am nearly," the boy yawned. "Good night—Honey! Wake me in time in the morning."

"That's a good name for yer to call me," the next o' kin commended. "I'll always be Honey to you, and you'll be Kiddy to me; and so we'll be pals. Buddies they call it over here."

Echoes of a street brawl reached them through the window. Had he been alone, the country lad of thirteen would have shivered, even though the night was hot. But the knowledge of this brawny companion, lying but a few feet away, nerved him to curl up like a puppy, and fall asleep trustfully.

XXI

THE next two or three nights were occasions for the interchange of confidence. During the days the new pals saw little of each other, and sometimes nothing at all. With the late afternoon they could "clean themselves," and take a little relaxation. For this there was no great range of opportunity. Relaxation for Lemuel Honeybun had hitherto run in directions from which he now felt himself cut off. He knew of no others, while the boy knew of none of any kind.

"I tell yer, Goody," Tom overheard, through the open door of the room back of Pappa's, one day while he was climbing the stairs, "I ain't a-goin' to go while I've got this job on me hands. The Lord knows I didn't seek it. It's just one of them things that's give yer as a dooty, and I'm goin' to put it through. When Quidmore's come back, and it's all over, I'll be right on the job with the old gang again; but till he does it's nix. Yer can't mean to think that I don't miss the old bunch. Why, I'd give me other eye . . ."

Tom heard no more; but the tone of regret worried him. True, if he wanted to break the bond this might be his chance. On the other hand, the thought of being again without a friend appalled him. While waiting in the hope that Quidmore might come back,

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the present arrangement was at least a cosy one. Nevertheless, he felt it due to his spirit of independence to show that he could stand alone. He waited till they were again lying feet to feet by the wall, and the air through the open window was cool enough to allow of their being comfortable, before he felt able to take an off-hand, man-to-man tone.

“You know, Honey, if you want to beat it back to your old crowd, I can get along all right. Don’t hang round here on my account.”

“Lord love you, Kiddy, I know how to sackerfice meself. If I’m to be yer next o’ kin, I’ll be it and be damned. Done ’arder things than this in me life, and pulled ’em off, too. I’ll stick to yer, kid, as long as yer wants me, if I never have another nice time in my life, and never see another quart bottle.”

The pathos of the life for which he might be letting himself in turned his thoughts backward over his career.

“Why, if I’d ’a stuck at not puttin’ others before meself I might still ’a been a gasfitter in Liverpool, Eng. That’s where I was born. True ’eart-of-oak Englishman I was. Some people thinks they can tell it in the way I talk. Been over ’ere so long, though, seems to me I ’andle the Yankee end of it pretty good. Englishman I met the other day—steward on one of the Cunarders he was—said he wouldn’t ’a knowed me from a born New Yorker. Always had a gift for langwidges. Used to know a Frenchman onst; and I’ll be ’anged if I wasn’t soon parley-vooin’ with him till he’d thought I was his mother’s son. But it’s doin’ my dooty by others as has brought me

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where I am, and I don't make no complaint of it. Job over at the Gansevoort whenever I wants one, which ain't always. Quite a tidy little sum in the savings bank in Brooklyn. Friends as 'll stick by me as long as I'll stick by them. And if I hadn't lost me eye—but how was I to know that that low-down butler was a-layin' for me at the silver-pantry door, and 'd let me have it anywhere he could 'it me? . . . And when that eyeball cracked, why, I yelled fit to bring the whole p'lice-force in New York right atop o' me."

Tom was astounded. "But you said you lost your eye saving a young lady's life."

Mr. Honeybun's embarrassment lasted no more than the time needed for finding the right words.

"Oh, did I? Well, that was the other side of it. Yer've heard that there's always two sides to a story, haven't yer? I can't tell yer both sides to onst, now can I?"

He judged it best, however, to revert to the autobiographical. The son of a dock hand in Liverpool, he had been apprenticed to a gasfitter at the age of seventeen.

"But my genius was for somethink bigger. I didn't know just what it'd be, but I could see it ahead o' me, all wuzzy-like. After a bit I come to know it was to fight agin the lor o' propuppy. Used to seem to me orful to look around and see that everythink was owned by somebody. Took to goin' to meetin's, I did. Found out that me and me class was the uninherited. 'Gord,' I says to meself then, 'I'll inherit somethink, or I'll bust all Liverpool.' Well, I did

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inherit somethink—inherited a good warm coat what a guy had left to mark his seat in the Midland Station. Got away with it, too. Knowin' it was mine as much as his, I walks up and throws it over my arm. Ten minutes later I was a-wearin' of it in Lime Street. That was the beginnin', and havin' started in, I begun to inherit quite a lot o' things. 'Nothink's easier,' says I, 'onst you realizes that the soul o' man is free, and that nothink don't belong to nobody.' Fightin' for me class, I was. Tried to make 'em see as they ought to stop bein' the uninherited, and get a move on—and the first thing I know I was landed in Walton jail. You're not asleep, Kiddy, are you?"

Not being asleep, Tom came in for the rest of the narrative. Released from Walton jail, Mr. Honeybun had "made tracks" for America.

"Wanted to git away from a country where everythink was owned, and find the land o' the free. But free! Lord love yer, I hadn't been landed a hour before I see everythink owned over 'ere as much as it is in a back'ard country like old England. Let me tell you this, Kid. Any man that thinks that by comin' to America he'll git somethink for nothink'll find hisself sold. I ain't had nothink except what I've worked for—or collared. Same old lor o' propuppy what's always been a injustice to the pore. Had to begin all over agin the same old game of fightin' it. But what's a few months in chokey when you're doin' it for yer feller creeters, to show 'em what their rights is?"

A few nights later Tom was startled by a new point of view as to his position.

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“I’ve been thinkin’, Kiddy, that since yer used to be a State ward, yer’ll have to be a State ward agin, if the State knows you’re knockin’ round loose.”

The boy cried out in alarm. “Oh, but I won’t be. I’ll kill myself first.”

He could not understand this antipathy, this horror. In a mechanical way the State had been good to him. The Tollivants had been good to him, too, in the sense that they had not been unkind. But he could not return to the status. It was the status that dismayed him. In Harfrey it had made him the single low-caste individual in a prim and high-caste world, giving everyone the right to disdain him. They couldn’t help disdaining him. They knew as well as he did that in principle he was a boy like any other; but by all the customs of their life he was a little pariah. Herding with thieves and murderers, it was still possible to respect himself; but to go back and hang on to the outer fringe of the organized life of a Christian society would have ravaged him within. He said so to Honeybun energetically.

“That’s the way I figured that yer’d feel. So long as you’re on’y waitin’—or yer can say that you’re on’y waitin’—till yer pop comes back, it won’t matter much. It’ll be when school begins that it’ll go agin yer. There’s sure to be some pious woman sneepin’ round that’ll tell someone as you’re not in school when you’re o’ school age, and then, me lad, yer’ll be back as a State ward on some down-homer’s farm.”

Tom lashed the bed in the darkness. “I won’t go! I won’t go!”

“That’s what I used to say the first few times they

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pinched me; but yer'll jolly well have to go if they send yer. Now what I was thinkin' is this. It's in New York State that yer'd be a State ward. If you was out o' this State there'd be all kinds o' laws that couldn't git yer back again. Onst when I'd been doin' a bit o' socializin' in New Jersey, and slipped back to Manhattan—well, you wouldn't believe the fuss it took to git me across the river when the p'lice got wind it was me. Never got me back at all! Thing died out before they was able to fix up all the coulds and couldn'ts of the lor."

He allowed the boy to think this over before going on with his suggestion.

"Now if you and me was to light out together to another State, they wouldn't notice that we'd gone before we was safe beyond their clutches. If we was to go to Boston, say! Boston's a good town. I worked Boston onst, me and a chap named . . ."

The boy felt called on to speak. "I wouldn't be a socialist, not if it gave me all Boston for my own."

The statement, coming as it did, had the vigor of an ultimatum. Though but a repetition of what he had said a few days before, it was a repetition with more force. It was also with more significance, fundamentally laying down a condition which need not be discussed again.

After long silence Mr. Honeybun spoke somewhat wistfully. "Well, I dunno as I'd count that agin yer. I sometimes thinks as I'll quit bein' a socialist meself. Seems to me as if I'd like to git back with the old gang, and be what they calls a orthodox. You know what a orthodox is, don't yer?"

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"It's a kind of religion, isn't it?"

"It ain't so much a kind of religion as it's a kind o' way o' thinkin'. You're a orthodox when you don't think at all. Them what ain't got no mind of their own, what just believes and talks and votes and lives the way they're told to, they're the orthodoxes. It don't matter whether it's religion or politics or lor or livin', the people who don't know nothink but just obeys other people what don't know nothink, is the kind that gits into the least trouble."

"Yes, but what do you want to be like that for? You *have* got a mind of your own."

"Well, there's a good deal to be said, Kiddy. First there's you."

"Oh, if it's only me . . ."

"Yes, but when I'm yer next o' kin it isn't on'y you; it's you first and last. I got to bring you up an orthodox, if I'm going to bring you up at all. Yer can't think for yerself yet. You're too young. Stands to reason. Why, I was twenty, and very near a trained gasfitter, before I'd begun thinkin' on me own. What yer does when yer're growed up'll be no concern o' mine. But till you *are* growed up . . ."

Tom had heard of quicksands, and often dreamed that he was being engulfed in one. He had the sensation now. Circumstances having pushed him where he would not have ventured of his own accord, the treacherous ground was swallowing him up. He couldn't help liking Honey Lem, since he liked everyone in the world who was good to him; he was glad of his society in these lonely nights, and of the sense of his comradeship in the background even in the day;

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but between this gratitude and a lifelong partnership he found a difference. There were so many reasons why he didn't want permanent association with this fairy godfather, and so many others why he couldn't find the heart to tell him so! He was casting about for a method of escape when the fairy godfather continued.

"This 'ere socialism is ahead of its time. People don't understand it. It don't do to be ahead o' yer time, not too far ahead, it don't. Now I figure out that if I was to go back a bit, and git in among them orthodoxs, I might do 'em good like. Could explain to 'em. I ain't sure but what I've took the wrong way, showin' 'em first, and explainin' to 'em afterwards. Now if I was to stop showin' 'em at all, and just explain to 'em, why, there'd be folks what when I told 'em that nothink don't belong to nobody they'd git the 'ang of it. Begins to seem to me as if I'd done me bit o' sufferin' for the cause. Seen the inside o' pretty near every old jug round New York. It's aged me. But if I was to sackerfice me opinions, and make them orthodoxs feel as I was one of 'em, I might give 'em a pull along like."

The next day being Sunday, they slept late into the morning. In the afternoon Honey Lem had a new idea. Without saying what it was, he took the boy to walk through Fourteenth Street, till they reached Fifth Avenue. Here they climbed to the top of an electric bus going northward, and Tom had a new experience. Except for having crossed it in the market lorry, in the dimness and emptiness of dawn, this stimulating thoroughfare was unknown to him.

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Even on a Sunday afternoon in summer, when shops were shut, residences closed, and saunterers relatively few, it added a new concept to those already in his mental possession. It was that of magnificence. These ornate buildings, these flashing windows, these pictures, jewels, flowers, fabrics, furnishings, did more than appeal to his eye. They set free a function of his being that had hitherto been sealed. The first atavistic memory of which he had ever been aware was consciously in his mind. Somewhere, perhaps in some life before he was born, rich and beautiful things had been his accessories. He had been used to them. They were not a surprise to him now; they came as a matter of course. To see them was not so much a discovery as it was a return to what he had been accustomed to. He was thinking of this, with an inward grin of derision at himself for feeling so, when Honey went back to the topic of the night before.

“The reason I said Boston is because they’ve got that great big college there. If I’m to bring yer up, I’ll have to send yer to college.”

The opening was obvious. “But, Honey, you don’t have to bring me up.”

“How can I be yer next o’ kin if I don’t bring ye’ up, a young boy like you? Be sensible, Kiddy. Yer ch’ice is between me and the State, and I’d be a lot better nor that, wouldn’t I? The State won’t be talkin’ o’ sendin’ yer to college, mind that now.”

There was no controverting the fact. As a State ward, he would not go to college, and to college he meant to go. If he could not go by one means he must

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go by another. Since Honey would prove a means of some sort, he might be obliged to depend on him.

The bus was bowling and lurching up the slope by which Fifth Avenue borders the Park, when Honey rose, clinging to the backs of the neighboring seats. "We'll git out at the next corner."

Having reached the ground, he led the way across the street, scanning the houses opposite.

"There it is," he said, with choked excitement, when he had found the façade he was looking for. "That big brown front, with the high steps, and the swell bow-winders. That's where the Whitelaw baby used to live."

Face to face with the spot, Tom felt a flickering of interest. He listened with attention while Honey explained how the baby carriage had for the last time been lifted down by two footmen, and how it was wheeled away by the nurse.

"Nash, her name was. I seen her come out one day, when Goody and me was standin' 'ere. Nice little thing she seemed, English, same as I be. Yes, Goody and me'd sniggle and snaggle ourselves every which way to see how we could cook up a yarn that'd ketch on to some o' that money. We sure did read the papers them days! There wasn't nothink about the Whitelaw baby what we didn't know. Now, if yer've looked long enough at the 'ouse, Kid, I'll show yer somethink else."

They went into the Park by the same little opening through which the Whitelaw baby had passed, not to return. Like a detective reconstructing the action of a crime, he followed the path Miss Nash had taken,

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almost finding the marks of the wheels in the gravel. Going round the shoulder of a little hill, they came to a fan-shaped elm, in the shade of which there was a seat. Beyond the seat was a clump of lilac, so grouped as to have a hollow like a horseshoe in its heart, with a second seat close by. Honey revived the scene as if he had witnessed it. Miss Nash had sat here; her baby carriage had stood there. The other nurse, name o' Miss Messenger, had put her baby beneath the elm, and taken her seat where she could watch it. All he was obliged to leave out was the actual exchange of the image for the baby, which remained a mystery.

"This 'ere laylock bush ain't the same what was growin' 'ere then. That one was picked down, branch by branch, and carried off for tokens. Had a sprig of it meself at one time. I always thinks them little memoriums is instructive. I recolleck there was a man 'anged in Liverpool, and the 'angman, a friend of my guv'nor's, give me a bit of the chap's shirt, what he'd left in his cell when he changed to a clean one to be 'anged in. Well, I kep' that bit o' shirt for years. Always reminded me not to murder no one. Wish I had it now. Funny it'd be, wouldn't it, if you turned out to be the Whitelaw baby? He'd a' been just about your age."

Tom threw himself sprawling on the seat where Miss Nash had read *Juliet Allingham's Sin*, and laughed lazily. "I couldn't be, because his name was Harry, and mine's Tom."

"Oh, a little thing like that wouldn't invidiate your claim."

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“But I haven’t got a claim. You don’t suppose my mother stole me, do you? That’s the very thing she used to tell me not to . . .”

The laugh died on his lips. As Honey stood looking down at him there was a light in his blue-gray eye like the striking of a match. Tom knew that the same thought was in both their minds. Why should a woman have uttered such a warning if she had not been afraid of a suspicion? A flush that not only reddened his tanned cheeks, but mounted to the roots of his bushy, horizontal eyebrows, made him angry with himself. He sprang to his feet.

“Look here, Honey! Aren’t there animals in this Park? Let’s go and find them.”

To his relief, Honey pressed no question as to his mother and stolen babies as they went off to the Zoo.

XXII

THE move to Boston was made during August, so that they might be settled in time for the opening of the schools. The flitting was with the ease of the obscure. Also with the ease of the obscure, Lemuel changed his name to George, while Tom Quidmore became again Tom Whitelaw. There were reasons to justify these decisions on the part of both.

“Got into trouble onst in Boston under the name of Lemuel, and if any old sneeper was to look me up . . . Not but what Lemuel isn’t a more aristocraticker name than George; but there’s times when somethink what no one won’t notice’ll suit you best. So I’ll be George Honeybun, a pal o’ yer father’s, what left yer to me on his dyin’ deathbed.”

The name of Tom Whitelaw was resumed on grounds both sentimental and prudential. In the absence of any other tie to the human race, it was something to the boy to know that he had had a father. His father had been a Whitelaw; his grandfather had been a Whitelaw; there was a whole line of Whitelaws back into the times when families first began to be known by names. A slim link with a past, at least it was a link. The Quidmore name was no link at all; it was disconnection and oblivion. It signified the ship that had never had a port. As a Whitelaw, he had sailed from somewhere, even though the port would forever be unknown to him.

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It was a matter of prudence, too, to cover up his traces. In the unlikely event of the State of New York busying itself with the fate of its former ward, the name of Quidmore would probably be used. A well-behaved Tom Whitelaw, living with his next of kin, and attending school in Boston according to the law, would have the best chance of going unmolested.

They found a lodging, cheap, humble, but sufficient, on that northern slope of Beacon Hill which within living memory has more than once changed hands with the silent advance and recession of a tide coming in and going out. There are still old people who can remember when some of the worthiest of the sons of the Puritans had their windows, in these steep and narrow streets, brightened by the rising or the setting sun. Then, with an almost ghostly furtiveness, they retired as the negro came and routed them. The negro seemed fixed in possession when the Hebrew stole on silently, and routed him. At the time when George Honeybun and Tom Whitelaw came looking for a home, the ancient inhabitant of the land was beginning to creep back again, and the Hebrew taking flight. In a red-brick house of forbidding expression in Grove Street they found a room with two beds.

Within a few days Honey, whose strength was his skill, was working as a stevedore on the Charlestown docks. Tom was picking up small jobs about the markets. By September he had passed his examinations and had entered the Latin School. A new life had begun. From the old life no pursuit or interference ever followed them.

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The boy shot up. In the course of a year he had grown out of most of his clothes. To the best of his modest ability, Honey was generous with new ones. He was generous with everything. That Tom should lack nothing, he cut down his own needs till he seemed to have none but the most elemental. Of his "nice times" in New York nothing had followed him to Boston but a love of spirits and tobacco. Of the two, the spirits went completely. When Tom's needs were pressing the supply of tobacco diminished till it sometimes disappeared. If on Sundays he could venture over the hill, to listen to the band on the Common, or stroll with the boy in the Public Gardens, it was because the Sunday suit, bought in the days when he had no one to provide for but himself, was sponged and pressed and brushed and mended, with scrupulous devotion. The motive of so much self-denial puzzled Tom, since, so far as he could judge, it was not affection.

He was old enough now to perceive that affection had inspired most of his good fortune. People were disposed to like him for himself. There was rarely a teacher who did not approve of him. By the market men, among whom he still picked up a few dollars on Saturdays and in vacations, he was always welcomed heartily. In school he never failed to hold his own till the boys discovered that his father, or uncle, or something, was a stevedore, after which he was ignored. Girls regarded him with a hostile interest, while toward them he had no sentiments of any kind. He could go through a street and scarcely notice that there was a girl in it, and yet girls wouldn't leave him

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alone. They bothered him with overtures of friendship to which he did not respond, or tossed their heads at him, or called him names. But in general the principle was established that he could be liked.

But Honey was an enigma. Love was apparently not the driving power urging him to these unexpected fulfillments. If it was, it had none of the harmless dog-and-puppy ways which Tom had grown accustomed to. Honey never pawed him, as the masters often pawed the boys, and the boys pawed one another. He never threw an arm across his shoulder, or called him by a more endearing name than Kiddy. Apart from an eagle-eyed solicitude, he never manifested tenderness, nor asked for it. That Tom would ever owe him anything he didn't so much as hint at. "Dooty o' next o' kin" was the blanket explanation with which he covered everything.

"But you're not my next of kin," Tom, to whom schooling had revealed the meaning of the term, was bold enough to object. "Next of kin means that you'd be my nearest blood relation; and we're not relations at all."

Honey was undisturbed in his Olympian detachment. "Do yer suppose I dunno that? But I believes as Gord sees we're kin lots o' times when men don't take no notice. You was give to me. You was put into my 'ands to bring up. And up I'm goin' to bring yer, if it breaks me."

It was a close Sunday evening in September, the last of the summer holidays. Tom would celebrate next day by entering on a higher grade at school. He had had new boots and clothes. For the first time he was

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worried by the source of this beneficence. As night closed down they sat for a breath of fresh air on the steps of the house in Grove Street. Grove Street held the reeking smell of cooking, garbage, and children, which only a strong wind ever blows away from the crowded quarters of the cities, and there had been no strong wind for a week. Used to that, they didn't mind it. They didn't mind the screeching chatter or the raucous laughter that rose from doorways all up and down the hill, nor the yelling of the youngsters playing in the roadway. Somewhere round a corner a group of Salvationists, supported by a blurring cornet, sang with much gusto:

Oh, how I love Jesus!
Oh, how I love Jesus!
Oh, how I love Jesus!
Because He first loved me.

They didn't mind it when Mrs. Danker, their landlady, a wiry New England woman, sitting in the dark of the hall behind them, joined in, in her cracked voice, with the Salvationists, nor when Mrs. Gribbens, a stout old party who picked up a living scrubbing railway cars, joined in with Mrs. Danker. From neighboring steps mothers called out to their children in Yiddish, and the children answered in strident American. But to Honey and Tom all this was the friendly give-and-take of promiscuity which they would have missed had it not been there.

Each was so concentrated on his own ruling purpose that nothing external was of moment. Honey was to give, and Tom was to receive, an education. That

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the recipient's heart should be fixed on it, Tom found natural enough; but that the giver's should be equally intense seemed to have nothing to account for it.

He glanced at the quiet figure, upright and muscular, his hands on his knees, like a stone Pharaoh on the Nile.

"Why don't you smoke?"

"I don't want to drop no ashes on this 'ere suit."

"Have you got any tobacco?"

"I didn't think to lay in none when I come 'ome yesterday."

"Is that because there was so much to be spent on me?"

"Oh, I dunno about that."

Tom gathered all his ambitions together and offered them up. "Well, I guess this can be the last year. After I've got through it I'll be ready to go to work."

"And not go to college!" The tone was one of consternation. "Lord love yer, Kiddy, what's bitin' yer now?"

"It's biting me that you've got to work so hard."

"If it don't bite me none, why not let it go at that?"

"Because I don't seem able to. I've taken so much from you."

"Well, I've had it to 'and out, ain't I?"

"But I don't see why you do it."

"A young boy like you don't have to see. There's lots o' things I didn't understand at your age."

"You don't seem specially—" he sought for words less direct, but without finding them—"you don't seem—specially fond of me."

"I never was one to be fond o' people, except it was

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a dog. Always had a 'ankerin' for a dog; but a free life don't let yer keep one. A dog'll never go back on yer."

"Well, do you think I would?"

"I don't think nothink about it, Kid. When the time comes that you can do without me . . ."

"That time'll never come, Honey, after all you've done for me."

"I don't want yer to feel yerself bound by that."

"I don't feel myself bound by it; but—dash it all, Honey!—whatever you feel or don't feel about me, I'm fond of *you*."

He was still imperturbable. "Well, Kid, you wouldn't be the first, not by a lot."

"But if I can never be anything *for* you, or *do* anything for you . . ."

"There's one thing you could do."

"What is it? I don't care how hard it is."

"Well, when you're one o' them big lawyers, or bankers, or somethink—drorin' yer fifty dollars a week—you can have a shy at this 'ere lor o' propuppy. It don't seem right to me that some people should have all the beef to chew, and others not so much as the bones; but I can't git the 'ang of it. If nothink don't belong to nobody, then what about all your dough in the New York savin's bank, and mine in the one in Brooklyn? We're keepin' it agin yer goin' to college, ain't we? And don't that belong to us? Yes, by George, it do! So there you are. But if when yer gits yer larnin' yer can stedly it out. . . ."

XXIII

THE boy was adolescent, sentimental, and lonely. Mere human companionship, such as that which Honey gave him, was no longer enough for him. He was seeing visions and dreaming dreams. He began to wish he had some one with whom to share his unformulated hopes, his crude and burning opinions. He looked at fellows who were friends going two and two, pouring out their foolish young hearts to each other, and envied them. The lads of his own age liked him well enough. Now and then one of them would approach him with shy or awkward signals, making for closer acquaintance; but when they learned that he lived in Grove Street with a stevedore they drew away. None of them ever transcended the law of caste, to stand by him in spite of his humble conditions. Boys whose families were down wanted nothing to hamper them in climbing up. Boys whose families were up wanted nothing that might loosen their position and pull them down. The sense of social insecurity which was the atmosphere of homes reacted on well-meaning striplings of fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen, turning them into snobs and cads before they had outgrown callowness.

But during the winter of the year in which he became sixteen there were two, you might have said three, who broke in upon this solitude.

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In walking to the Latin School from Grove Street he was in the habit of going through Louisburg Square. If you know Boston you know Louisburg Square as that quaint red-brick rectangle, like many in the more Georgian parts of London, which commemorates the gallant dash of the New England colonists on the French fortress of Louisburg in Cape Breton. It is the heart of that conservative old Boston, which is now shrinking in size and importance before the onset of the foreigner till it has become like a small beleaguered citadel. Here the descendants of the Puritans barricade themselves behind their financial walls, as their ancestors within their stockades, while their city is handed over to the Irishman and the Italian as an undefended town. The Boston of tradition is a Boston of tradition only. Like the survivors of Noah's deluge clinging to the top of a rock, they to whom the Boston of tradition was bequeathed are driven back on Beacon Hill as a final refuge from the billows rising round them. A high-bred, cultivated, sympathetic people, they have so given away their heritage as to be but a negligible factor in the State, in the country, of which their fathers and grandfathers may be said once to have kept the conscience.

But to Tom Whitelaw Louisburg Square meant only the dignified fronts and portals behind which lived the rich people who had no point of contact with himself. They couldn't have ignored him more completely than he ignored them. He thought of them as little as the lion cub in a circus parade thinks of the people of the city through which he passes in proces-

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sions. Then, one day, one of these strangers spoke to him.

It was a youth of about his own age. More than once, as Tom went by, and the stout boy stood on the sidewalk in front of his own house, they had looked each other up and down with unabashed mutual appraisal. Tom saw a lad too short for his width, and unhealthily flabby. He had puffy hands, and puffy cheeks, with eyes seeming smaller than they were because the puffy eyelids covered them. The mouth had those appealing curves comically troubled in repose, but fulfilling their purpose in giggling. On the first occasion when Tom passed by the lips were set to the serious task of inspection. They said nothing; they betrayed nothing. Tom himself thought nothing, except that the boy was fat.

They had looked at each other some two or three times a week, for perhaps a month, when one day the fat boy said, "Hullo!" Tom also said, "Hullo!" continuing on his way. A day or two later they repeated these salutations, though neither forsook his attitude of reserve. The fat boy did this first, speaking when they had hullo'ed each other for the third or fourth time. His voice was high and girlish, and yet with a male crack in it.

"What school do you go to?"

Tom stopped. "I go to the Latin School. What school do you go to?"

"I go to Doolittle and Pray's."

"That's the big private school in Marlborough Street, isn't it?"

The fat boy made the inarticulate grunt which with

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most Americans means "Yes." "I was put down for Groton, only mother wouldn't let me leave home. I'm going to Harvard."

"I'm going to Harvard, too. What class do you expect to be in?"

The fat boy replied that he expected to be in the class of nineteen-nineteen.

Tom said he expected to be in that class himself.

"Now I've got to beat it to the Latin School. So long!"

"So long!"

Tom carried to his school in the Fenway an unusual feeling of elation. With friendly intent someone had approached him from the world outside. It was not the first time it had ever happened, but it was the first time it had ever happened in just this way. He could see already that the fat boy was not one of those he would have chosen for a friend; but he was so lonely that he welcomed anyone. Moreover, he divined that the fat boy was lonely, too. Boys of that type, the Miss Nancy and the mother's darling type, were often consumed by loneliness, and no one ever pitied them. Few went to their aid when other boys "picked" on them, but of those few Tom Whitelaw was always one. He found them, once you had accepted their mannerisms, as well worth knowing as other boys, while they spared him a scrap of admiration. It was possible that in this fat boy he might find the long-sought fellow who would not "turn him down" on discovering that he lived in Grove Street. Being turned down in this way had made him sick at heart so often that he had decided never any more to

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make or trust advances. In suffering temptation again he assured himself that it would be for the last time in his life.

On returning from school he looked for the boy in Louisburg Square, but he was not there. A few hundred yards farther, however, he came in for another adventure.

The January morning had been mild, with melting snow. By midday the wind had shifted to the north, with a falling thermometer. By late afternoon the streets were coated with a glaze of ice. Tom could swagger down the slope of Grove Street easily enough in the security of rubber soles.

But not so a girl, whose slippers and high French heels made her helpless on the steep glare. Having ventured over the brow of the hill, she found herself held. A step into the air would have been as easy as another on this slippery descent. The best she could do was to sway in the keen wind, keeping her balance with the grace of one of the blue spruces which used to be blown about at Bere. Her outstretched arms waved up and down, as a blue spruce waves its branches. Coming abreast of her, Tom found her laughing to herself, but on seeing him she laughed frankly and aloud.

“Oh, catch me! I’m going to tumble! Ow-w-w!”

Tom snatched at one hand, while she caught him by the shoulder with the other.

“Saved! Wasn’t it lucky that you came along? You’re the Whitelaw boy, aren’t you?”

Tom admitted that he was, though his new sensations, with this exquisite creature clinging to him like

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a drowning man to his rescuer, choked the monosyllable in his throat. Though he had often in a scrimmage protected little boys, he had never before been thrown into this comic, laughing tussle with a girl. It had the excuse for itself that she couldn't stand unless he held her up. He held her firmly, looking into her dancing eyes with his first emotional consciousness of a girl's prettiness.

His arm supporting her, she ventured on a step. "I'm Maisie Danker," she explained, while taking it. "I see you going in and out the house."

"I've never seen you."

"Perhaps you've seen me and not noticed me."

"I couldn't," he declared, with vehemence. "I've never seen you before in my life. If I had . . ."

Her high heels so nearly slipped from under her that they were compelled to hold each other as if in an embrace. "If you had—what?"

He knew what, but the words in which to say it needed a higher mode of utterance. The red lips, the glowing cheeks, had the vitality of the lively eyes. A red tam-o'-shanter, a red knitted thing like a heavenly translation of his own earthly sweater, were bewitchingly diabolic when worn with a black skirt, black stockings, and black shoes.

As he did not respond to her challenge, she went on with her self-introduction. "I guess you haven't seen me, because I only arrived three days ago. I'm Mrs. Danker's niece. Live in Nashua. Worked in the woolen mills there. Now I've come to visit my aunt for the winter."

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For the sake of hearing her speak, he asked if she was going to work in Boston.

"I don't know. Maybe I'll take singing lessons. Got a swell voice."

If again he was dumb it was because of the failure of his faculties. Nothing in his experience had prepared him for the give-and-take of a badinage in which the surface meanings were the less important. Foolish and helpless, unable to show his manly superiority except in the strength with which he held her up, he got a lesson in the new art there and then.

"Ever dance?"

"I'm never asked."

"Oh, it's you that ought to do the asking."

"I mean that I'm never asked where there's dancing going on."

"Gee, you don't have to be. You just find a girl—and go."

"But I don't know how to dance."

"I'll teach you."

Slipping and sliding, with cries of alarm on her part, and stalwart assurances on his, they approached their own doorstep.

"Ow-w-w! Hold me! I'm going!"

"No you're not—not while I've got you."

"But I don't want to grab you so hard."

"That's all right. I can stand it."

"But I can't. I'm not used to it."

"Then it's a very good time to begin."

"What's the use of beginning if there's nothing to go on with?"

"How do you know there won't be?"

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“Well, what can there be?”

Had Miss Danker always waited for answers to her questions Tom would have been more nonplussed than he was. But the game which he didn't know at all she knew thoroughly, according to her lights. She never left him at a loss for more than a few seconds at a time. Her method being that of touch-and-go, reserving to herself the right of coming back again, she carried his education one step farther still.

“Don't you ever go to the movies?”

He replied that he had gone once or twice with Honey, but not often. To be on the same breezy level as herself, he added in explanation: “Haven't got the dough.”

“But the movies don't take dough, not hardly any.”

“They take more than I've got.”

“More than you've got? Gee! Then you can't have anything at all.”

It was not so much a taunt as it was a statement, and yet it was a statement with a little taunt in it. For once driven to bravado, he gave away a secret.

“Well, I haven't—except what's in the bank.”

“Oh, you've got money in the bank, have you?”

“Sure! But I'm keeping it to go to college.”

She stared at him as if he had been a duck-billed rabbit, or some variety of fauna hitherto unknown.

“Gee! I should think a fellow who had money in the bank would want to blow some of it on having a good time—a fellow with any jazz.”

Once more she spared him discomfiture. Slipping into the hallway, she said over her shoulder as he followed her: “How old are you?”

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“Sixteen.”

She flashed round at him. “Sixteen! Gee! I thought you was my age if you was a day. Honest I did. I’m eighteen, an old lady compared with you.”

“Oh, but boys are always older than girls, for their age.”

“You are, sure. Anyways, you saved me on that slippery hill, and I think you ought to have a kiss for it. Come, baby, kiss your poor old ma.”

Though the hallway was dark, the kiss had to be given and taken furtively. Whatever it was to Maisie Danker, to Tom Whitelaw it was the entrance to a higher and an increased life. The pressure of her lips on his sent through his frame a dynamic glow he had not supposed to be among nature’s possibilities. Moreover, it threw light on that experience as to which he had mused ever since he had first talked confidentially to Bertie Tollivant. Though instinct had taught him something in the intervening years, he had up to this minute gained nothing in the way of practical discovery. Now an horizon that had been dark was lifting to disclose a wonderland.

With her light laugh Maisie had run into her aunt’s apartment, and shut the door. Tom began heavily, pensively, to climb the stairs. But halfway up he paused to mark off another stage in his perceptions.

“So that’s what it’s like! That’s why they all think so much about it—and try to hush it up!”

XXIV

HE himself found something to hush up when he recounted the incident to Honey in the evening. He told of meeting Mrs. Danker's niece on the ice-coated hill, and helping her down to the door. Of his sensations as she clung to him he said nothing. He said nothing of the kiss in the dark hallway. During the rest of the evening, and after he had gone to bed, he wondered why. They all hushed these things up, and he did as the rest; but what was the basic reason?

As his first emotional encounter the subject was sufficiently in his mind next day to make him duller than usual at school. On his way home from school it so preoccupied his thought that he forgot to look for the fat boy. It was the fat boy who first saw him, hailing him as he approached. There was already between them that acceptance of each other which is the first stage of friendship.

"What's your name?"

"Tom Whitelaw. What's yours?"

"Guy Ansley. How old are you?"

"Sixteen. How old are you?"

"I'm sixteen, too. What's your father do?"

"I haven't got a father. I live with—" it was difficult to explain—"with a man who kind o' takes care of me."

"A guardian?"

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“Something like that. What does your father do?”

“He’s a corporation lawyer. Makes big money, too.” As Tom began to move along the fat boy went with him, keeping step. “What’s your guardian do?”

“He does anything that’ll give him a job. Mostly he’s a stevedore.”

“What’s a stevedore? Sounds as if it had something to do with bull-fighting.”

“It’s a longshoreman. He loads and unloads ships.”

They stopped at the corner of Pinckney Street. The puffy countenance fell. Tom could follow his companion’s progression of bewilderments.

“Where do you live?”

“I live in Grove Street.”

It was the minute of suspense. All had been confessed. The countenance that had fallen went absolutely blank. To himself the tall, proud, sensitive lad was saying that his future life was staked on the response the fat boy chose to make. If he showed signs of wriggling out of an embarrassing situation he, Tom Whitelaw, would range himself forever with the enemies of the rich.

The fat boy spoke at last.

“So you’re that kind of fellow.”

“Yes, I’m that kind of fellow.”

This was mere marking time. The decision was still to come. It came with an air on the fat boy’s part of heroic resolution.

“Well, I don’t care.”

Tom breathed again, breathed with bravado. “Neither do I.”

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In the stress of so much big-heartedness the girlish voice became a croak. "I know guys who think that if another guy isn't rich they must treat him as so much dirt. I'm not that sort. I'm democratic. I wouldn't turn down a fellow just because he lived in Grove Street. If I liked him I'd stick to him. I'm not snobbish. How do you know you couldn't give him a peg up, and he'd be grateful to you all his life?"

Thinking this over afterward, Tom found it hard to disengage the bitter from the sweet; but he had not much chance to think it over. Any spare minute he found pre-empted by Maisie Danker, who seemed to camp in the dark hallway. If she was not there when he entered, she appeared before he could go upstairs. The ice having melted in the street, she had other needs of protection, an errand to do in the crowded region of Bowdoin Square, a shop to visit across the Common which was so wide and lonesome in winter twilights, a dance hall to locate in case they ever made up their minds to visit it. She was always timid, clinging, laughing, adorable. The embodiment of gayety, she made him gay, which was again a new sensation. Never before had he felt young as he felt young with her. The minutes they spent swamped in the throngs of the lighted streets, between five and seven on a winter's afternoon, were his first minutes of escape from a world of care. Care had been his companion since he could remember anything; and now his companion was this exquisite thing, all lightsomeness and joy.

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He was later than usual in returning from school one afternoon, because a teacher had given him a commission to carry out which took some two hours of his time. As it had sent him toward the south end of the city, he had the Common to traverse on his way home. Snow had recently fallen; but through the main avenues under the trees the paths had been cleared. On the Frog Pond the drifts had been swept up, so that there could be a little skating. As Tom passed by he could hear the scraping and grinding of skates, and the hoarse shouts of hobbledehoys. At any other time he would have stopped, either to look on peacefully, or to take part in some bit of free-for-all, rough-and-tumble skylarking in the snow. But Maisie might be waiting. She might even have given up waiting, which would take all his pleasure from the afternoon.

To reach home more quickly he followed a short cut, scarcely shoveled out, on the slope of the Common below Beacon Hill. Here there were no foot passengers but himself. Neither, for some little distance, were there any trees. There was only the white shroud of the snow, freezing to a crust. A misty moon drifted through a tempest of scudding clouds, while wherever in the offing there was a group of elms the electric lights danced through their tossing branches as if they were wind-blown lanterns.

In spite of his hurry, the boy came to a standstill. It was a minute at which to fancy himself lost in Moosonee or Labrador. His *voyageur* guides had failed him; his dog team had run away; his pemmican—he supposed it would be pemmican—had given out. He

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was homeless, starving, abandoned, alone but for the polar bears.

It was not a polar bear that he saw come floundering down the hillside, but it might have been a black one. It was certainly black; its nature was certainly animal. It rolled and tumbled and panted and grunted, and now and then it moaned. For a few minutes it remained stationary, with internal undulations; then it scrambled a few paces, as an elephant might scramble whose feet had been sawn off. A dying mammoth would also have emitted just these raucous groans.

Suddenly it squealed. The squeal was like that of a pig when the knife is thrust into its throat. It was girlish, piercing, and yet had a masculine shriek in it. Tom Whitelaw knew what was happening. It had happened to himself so often in the days when he was different from other boys that his fists seemed to clench and his feet to spring before his mind had given the command. In clearing the fifty odd yards of snow between him and the wallowing monster, he chose a form of words which young hooligans would understand as those of authority.

“What in hell are yez doin’ to that kid? Are yez puttin’ a knife in him? Leave him be, or I’ll knock the brains out of every one of yez.”

He was in among them, laying about him before they knew what had landed in their midst. They were not brutal youngsters; they were only jocose in the manner of their kind. Having spied the fat boy coming down to watch the skating, it was as natural for them to jump on him as it would be for a pack of

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dogs who chanced to see a sloth. With the courage of the mob, and also with its rapidity of thought-transfer, they had closed in silently and rushed him. He was on his back in a second. In a second they were clambering all over him. When he staggered to his feet they let him run, only to catch him and pull him down again. So staggering, so running, so coming down like a lump of jelly in the snow, he had reached the top of the hill, his tormentors hanging to him as if their teeth were in his flesh, at the minute when Tom first perceived the black mass.

The fat boy had not lacked courage. He had fought. That is, he had kicked and bitten and scratched, with the fury of vicious helplessness. He had not cried for mercy. He had not cried out at all. He had struggled for breath; he had nearly strangled; but his pantings and gruntings were only for breath just as were theirs. Strong in spite of his unwieldiness, he was not without the moral spunk which can perish at a pinch, but will not give in.

None of them had struck him. That would have been thought cowardly. They had only plastered him with snow, in his mouth, in his ears, in his eyes, and down below his collar. This he could have suffered, still without a plea, had not their play become fiercer. They began to tear open his clothing, to wrench it off the buttons. They stuffed snow inside his waistcoat, inside his shirt, inside his trousers. He was naked to the cold. And yet it was not the cold that drew from him that piglike squeal; it was the indignity. He was Guy Ansley, a rich man's son, in his native sanctified

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old Boston a young lordling; but these muckers had mauled the last rag of honor out of him.

They were good-natured little demons, with no more notion of his tragedy than if he had been a snowman. As soon as the strapping young giant had leaped in among them, they ran off with screams of laughter. Most of them were tired of the fun in any case; a few lingered at a distance to "call names," but even they soon disappeared. Tom could only help the lumbering body to its feet.

Cleaning him of snow was more difficult, and since it was melting next his skin, it had to be done at once. The shirt and underclothing being wet, and a keen wind blowing, his teeth were soon chattering. Even when buttoned tightly in his outer clothes he was dank and clammy within. It helped him a little that Tom should strip off his own overcoat and exchange with him; but nothing could really warm him till he got into his own bed.

They would have run all of the short distance to Louisburg Square only that young Ansley was not a runner at any time, and at this time was exhausted. Tom could only drag him along as a dead weight. Except for the brief observations necessary to what they had to do, they hardly spoke a word. Speech was nearly impossible. The only aim of importance was covering the ground.

The old manservant who admitted them in Louisburg Square went dumb with dismay. Having brought his charge into the hall, Tom was obliged to take the lead.

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"He's been tumbling in the snow. He's got wet. He may have caught a chill. Better call his mother."

The fat boy spoke. "Mother's in New York. So's father. Here, Pilcher, help me up to my room."

As the two went up the stairs, Tom was left standing in the hall. A voice at the head of the stairs arrested his attention because it was a girl's. Since knowing Maisie Danker, all girls' voices had begun to interest him. This voice was clear, silvery, peremptory, a little sharp, like the note of a crystal bell. Pilcher explained something, whereupon the owner of the voice ran down. On the red carpet of the stairs, with red-damasked paper as a background, her white figure was spiritlike beneath a dim oriental hall light.

"I'm Hildred Ansley," she said, with a cool air of self-possession. "I see my brother's had an accident. Pilcher is putting him to bed. I'm sure we're very much obliged to you."

She was only a child, perhaps fourteen, but a competent child, who knew what to say. Not pretty, as Maisie was, she had presence and personality. In this she was helped by her height, since she was tall, and would be taller, and more by her intelligence. It was the first time he had ever had occasion to observe that some faces were intelligent, though it was not quite easy to say why. "Little Miss Ansley knows what's what," he commented silently, but aloud he said that if he were in her place he would send for a doctor. Though her brother had had no bones broken, he might easily have caught a bad cold.

"Thank you! I'll do it at once."

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She made her way to a table, somewhat belittered with caps and gloves, behind the stairs, at the back of the hall. Taking up the receiver, she called a number, politely and yet with a ring of command. While she was speaking he noticed his surroundings.

If to him they seemed baronial it was because his experience had been cramped. Louisburg Square is not baronial; it is only dignified. For the early nineteenth century its houses were spacious; for the early twentieth they are a little narrow, a little steep, a little lacking in imaginative outlet. But to Tom Whitelaw, with memories that went back to the tenements of New York, to whom the homes of the Tollivants and the Quidmores had meant reasonable comfort, who found the sharing of one room with George Honeybun endurable, these walls with their red paper, these stairs with their red carpet, this lofty gloom, this sense of wealth, were all that he dreamed of as palatial.

When Miss Ansley returned from the telephone, he asked if he might have his overcoat. Her brother had worn it upstairs on going to his room. "That's his," he explained, pointing to the soggy Burberry he had thrown down on a carved settle.

"Oh, certainly! I'll run up and get it. I won't ask you to go upstairs to the drawing-room; but if you don't mind taking a seat in here . . ."

Throwing open the door of the dining room, which was on the ground floor, she switched on the light. Tom entered and stood still. So this was the sort of place in which rich people took their meals!

It was a glow of rich gleaming lights, lights from mahogany, lights from silver, lights from porcelain.

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In the center of the table lay a round piece of lace, on which stood a silver dish with nothing in it. He knew without being told, though he had never thought of it before, that it needed nothing in it. There were things so beautiful as to fulfil their purpose merely in being beautiful. From above a black-marble mantelpiece a man looked down at him with jovial eyes, a man in a high collar and huge black neckerchief, who might have been the grandfather or great-grandfather of Guy and Hildred Ansley. He had the fat good humor of the one and the bright intelligence of the other, the source in his genial self of types so widely different.

Young Miss Ansley tripped in with the coat across her arm. "I'm sure my father and mother will want to thank you when they come back. Guy's been very naughty. He's always forbidden to leave the Square when he goes out of doors. He wouldn't have done it if papa and mamma hadn't been away. I can't make him mind *me*. But you must come back when everybody's here, so that you can be thanked properly. I suppose you live somewhere near us?"

Tom found it easiest to answer indirectly. "Your brother knows everything about me. I've seen him once or twice in the Square, and I've told him who I am."

"That'll be very nice."

She held out her hand, and he accepted his dismissal. But before having closed the door behind him, he turned round to her as she stood under the oriental lamp.

"I hope your brother will soon be all right again.

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I think they ought to give him a hot drink. He's—he's got big stuff in him when you come to find it out. He'll make his way."

The transformation in her was electric. She ceased to be starched and competent, with a manner that put a thousand miles between him and her. The intelligence he had already noted in her face was aflame with a radiance beyond beauty.

"Oh, I'm so glad you can say that! No one outside the family has ever said it before. He's a *lamb!*—and hardly anybody knows it."

She held out her hand again. As he took it he saw that her eyes, which he thought must be dark, were shining with a mist of tears.

Going down the hill he repeated the two names: Maisie Danker! Hildred Ansley! They called up concepts so different that it was hard to think them of a common flesh. Though Masie Danker was a woman and Hildred Ansley but a child, there were points at which you could compare them. In the comparison the advantages lay so richly with the girl in Louisburg Square that he fell back on the fact, stressing it with emphasis, that Maisie was the prettier. "After all," he reflected, with comfort in the judgment, "that's all that matters—to a man."

XXV

A FEW days after his rescue of Guy Ansley from the snow Tom Whitelaw found himself addressed by that young gentleman's sister, aged fourteen. She had plainly been watching for him as he went through Louisburg Square on his way from school. He had almost passed the Ansley steps before the tall, slight girl ran down them.

"Oh, Mr. Whitelaw!"

As it was the first time he had ever been honored with this prefix, he felt shocked and slightly foolish.

"Yes, Miss Ansley?"

A little breathless, she was, as he had noticed during their previous meeting, oddly grown up for her age, as one who takes responsibilities because there is no one else to bear them. She had the manner and selection of words of a woman of thirty.

"I hope you won't mind my waylaying you like this, but my brother would so much like to see you. You've been so awfully kind that I hope you'll come up. He's in bed, you know."

"When does he want me to come?"

"Well, now, if it isn't troubling you too much. You see, my father and mother are coming home to-night, and he'd like to have a word with you before then. He won't keep you more than a few minutes."

What Tom obscurely felt as an honor to himself she put as a favor he was doing them. It was an

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honor in that it admitted him a little farther into privacies which to him seemed tapestried with privilege and tradition. His one brief glimpse of their way of living had not made him discontented; it had only appealed to his faculty for awe.

Awe was what he was aware of in following his young guide up the two red staircases to the room where the fat boy lay in bed. It was a mother's-darling's room, amusingly out of keeping with the pudgy, fleshy being whom it housed. Flowered paper on the walls, flowered hangings at the windows, flowered cretonnes on thickly upholstered armchairs, flowered silk on the duvet, garlands of flowers on the headboard and footboard of the virginal white bedstead, made the piggy eyes and piggy cheeks, bolstered up by pillows of which some were trimmed with lace, the more funnily grotesque. Tom Whitelaw saw neither the fun nor the grotesqueness. All he could take in was the fact that beauty could gild the lily of this luxury. He knew nothing of beauty in his own denuded life. The room with two beds which he still shared with Honey at Mrs. Danker's was not so much a sanctuary as a lair.

The fat boy's giggles were those of welcome, and also those of embarrassment.

"After the scrap the other night got sick. Bronchitis. Sit down."

Tom looked round to see what Miss Ansley was doing, but slipping away, she shut the door behind her. He sank into the flowered armchair nearest to the bed. The cracked girlish voice, which now had a wheeze in it, went on.

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“They’ve wired for dad and mother, and they’re coming home to-night. Thought that before they got here I’d put you wise to something I want you to do.”

Waiting for more, Tom sat silent, while the poor piggy face screwed itself up as if it meant to cry.

“Dad and mother think that because I’m so fat I’m not a sport. But they’re dead wrong, see? I *am* a sport; only—only—” he was almost bursting into tears—“only the damn fat won’t let me get it out, see?”

“Yes, I see. I now you’re a sport all right, old chap. Of course!”

“Well, then, don’t let them think the other thing, if they were to ask you.”

“Ask me what?”

“Ask you what the row was about the other afternoon. If they do that tell ’em we were only playing nigger-in-the-henhouse, or any other snow game. Don’t say I was knocked down by a lot of kids. Make ’em think I was having the devil’s own good time.”

Tom Whitelaw knew this kind of humiliation. If he had not been through Guy Ansley’s special phase of it he had been through others.

“I’ll tell them what I saw. You and a lot of other fellows were skylarking in the snow, and I went by and got you to knock off. As I had to pass your door we came home together; but when I found you were wet to the skin I advised Miss Ansley to see that you hit the hay. That’s all there was to it.”

In the version of the incident the strain of truth was sufficiently clear to allow the fat boy to approve

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of it. He didn't want to tell a lie, or to get Tom Whitelaw to tell a lie; but sport having been the object with which he had stolen away on that winter's afternoon, it was easy to persuade himself that he had got it. Before Tom went away Guy Ansley understood that he would figure to his parents not as a victim but as something of a tough.

"Gee, I wish I was you," he grinned at Tom, who stood with his hands on the doorknob.

"Me!" Tom was never so astonished in his life. His eyes rolled round the room. "How do you think I live?"

"Oh, live! That's nothing. What I'd like to do is to rough it. If they'd let me do that I shouldn't be—I shouldn't be wrapped up in fat like a mummy in—in whatever it is they're wrapped up in. *You* can get away with anything on looks."

Sincere as was this tribute, it meant nothing to Tom Whitelaw, looks being no part of his preoccupations. What, for the minute, he was thinking about was that nobody in the world seemed to be quite satisfied. Here he was envying Guy Ansley his down quilt and his comfortable chairs, while Guy was envying him the rough-and-tumble of privation.

"I shouldn't look after him too much," he said to the young sister whom, on coming downstairs, he found waiting at the front door. "There's nothing wrong with him, except that he's a little stout. He's got lots of pluck."

Her face glowed. The glow brought out its intelligence. The intelligence set into action a demure, mysterious charm, almost oriental.

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"That's just what I always say, and no one ever believes me. Mother makes a baby of him."

"If he could only fight his own way a little more . . ."

"Oh, I do hope you'll say that if they speak to you about him."

"I will if I ever get the chance, but . . ."

"Oh, you must get the chance. I'll make it. You see, you're the only boy Guy's ever taken a fancy to who didn't treat him as a joke."

Tom assured her that her brother was not the only fellow who had a hard fight to put up during boyhood. He had seen them by the dozen who, just because of some trifling oddity, or unusual taste, were teased, worried, tormented, till school became a hell; but that didn't keep them from turning out in the end to be the best sports among them all. Very likely the guying did them good. He thought it might. He, Tom Whitelaw, had been through a lot of it, and now that he was sixteen he wasn't sorry for himself a bit. He used to be sorry for himself, but . . .

Seeing her for the second time, and in daylight, her features grew more distinct to him. He mused on them while continuing his way homeward. To say she was not pretty, as he had said the other night, was to use a form of words calling for amplification. It was the first time he had had occasion to observe that there are faces to which beauty is not important.

"It's the way she looks at you," was his form of summing up; and yet for the way she looked at you he had no sufficient phraseology.

That her eyes were long, narrow, and yellow-brown,

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ever so slightly Mongolian, he could see easily enough. That her nose was short, with a little tilt to it, was also a fact he had no difficulty in stating. As for her coloring, it was like that of a russet apple when the brown has a little gold in it and the red the brightness of carmine. Her hair was saved from being ugly by running to the quaint. Straight, black—black with a bluish gloss—it was worn not in the pigtail with which he was most familiar, but in two big plaits curved behind the ears, and secured he didn't know how. She reminded him of a colored picture he had seen of a Cambodian girl, a resemblance enhanced by the dark blue dress she wore, straight and formless down the length of her immature, boylike figure, and marked at the waistline by a circle of gold braid.

But all these details were subordinate to something he had no power of defining. It was also something of which he was jealous as an injustice to Maisie Danker. If this girl had what poor Maisie had not it was because money gave her an advantage. It was the kind of advantage that wasn't fair. Because it wasn't fair, he felt it a challenge to his loyalty.

Nevertheless, he could not accept Maisie's offhand judgments when between five and six that afternoon he told her of the incident.

This was at The Cherry Tree, one of those bowers of refreshment and dancing recently opened on their own slope of Beacon Hill. Bower was the word. What had once been the basement-kitchen and coal cellar of a small brick dwelling had been artfully converted into a long oval orchard of cherry trees, in

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paper luxuriance of foliage and blossom. Within the boskage, and under Chinese lanterns, there were tables; out in the open was a center oval cleared for dancing. Somewhere out of sight a cracked fiddle and a flat piano rasped out the tango or some shred of "rag." With the briefest intervals for breath, this performance was continuous. The guests, who at that hour in the afternoon numbered no more than ten or twelve, forsook their refreshments to take the floor, or forsook the floor to return to their refreshments, just as the impulse moved them. They were chiefly working girls, young men at leisure because out of jobs, or sailors on shore. Except for an occasional hoarse or screechy laugh, the decorum was proper to solemnity.

It was the fourth or fifth time Tom and Maisie had come to this retreat, nominally that Tom should learn to dance, but really that they should commune together. To him the occasions were blissful for the reason that he had no one else in the world to commune with. To talk, to talk eagerly, to pour out the torrent of opinions boiling within him, meant more than that Maisie should understand him. Maisie didn't understand him. She only laughed and joked with pretty inanity; but she let him talk. He talked about the books he liked and didn't like, about the advantages college men possessed over those who weren't college men, about what he knew of the banking system, about the good you conferred on the world and yourself when you saved your money and invested it. In none of these subjects was she interested; but now and then she could get a turn to talk of the movies,

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the new dances, and love. That these subjects made him uneasy was not, from Maisie's point of view, a reason for avoiding them.

Each was concerned with the other, but beyond the other each was concerned most of all with the mystery called Life. To live was what they were after, to live strongly and deeply and vividly and hotly, and to do it with the pinched means and narrow opportunities which were all they could command. In his secret heart Tom Whitelaw knew that Maisie Danker was not the girl out of all the world he would have sought of his own accord, while Maisie Danker was equally aware that this boy two years younger than herself couldn't be the generous provider she was looking for. They were only like shipwrecked passengers thrown together on an island. They must make the best of each other. No other girl, hardly any other human being except Honey, had entered the social isolation in which he was marooned, and as for her . . .

She was so cheery and game that she never referred to her home experiences otherwise than allusively. From allusions he gathered that she was not with her aunt, Mrs. Danker, merely for pleasure or from pressure of affection. Her father was living; her stepmother was living too. There was a whole step-family of little brothers and sisters. Her father drank; her stepmother hated her; there was no room for her at home. All her life she had been knocked about. Even when she worked in the woolen mills she couldn't keep her wages. She had had fellows, but none of them was ever any good. The best of

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them was a French Canadian who made big money, but he wouldn't marry her unless she "turned Catholic." "If he couldn't give up his church for me I couldn't give up mine for him; so there it was!" There was another fellow. . . . But as to him she said little. In speaking of him at all her face grew somber, which it did rarely. Either because he had failed her, or to get her out of his clutches, Tom was not sure which, her aunt had offered her a home for the winter. "Gee, it makes me laff," was her own sole comment on her miseries.

As Tom had dropped into the habit of telling her the small happenings of his uneventful life, he gave her, across the ice-cream sodas, an account of what had just occurred between himself and Guy and Hildred Ansley.

She listened with what for her was gravity. "You've got to give some of them society girls the cold glassy eye," she informed him, judicially. "If you don't you'll get it yourself, perhaps when you ain't expecting it."

"Oh, but this is only a little girl, not more than fourteen. She just *seems* grown up. That's the funny part of it."

"Not more than fourteen! Just *seems* grown up! Why, any of that bunch is forwarder at ten than I'd be at twenty. That's one thing I'd never be, not if men was scarcer than blue raspberries—forward. And yet some of them society buds'll be brassier than a knocker on a door."

"Oh, but this little Miss Ansley isn't that sort."

"You wouldn't know, not if she was running up

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and down your throat. Any girl can get hold of a man if she makes him think she needs him bad enough."

"It wasn't she who needed me; it was her brother."

"A brother'll do. A grandmother'd do. If you can't bait your hook with a feather fly, you can take a bit of worm. But once a fella like you begins to take a shine to one of them . . ."

"Shine to one of them! Me?"

"Well, I suppose you'll be taking a shine to *some* girl *some* day. Why shouldn't you?"

"If I was going to do that . . ."

The point at which he suspended his sentence was that which piqued her especially. Her eyes were provocative; her bright face alert.

"Well, if you were going to do that—what of it?"

The minute was one he was trying to evade. As clearly as if he were fifty, he knew the folly of getting himself involved in an emotional entanglement. Though he looked a young man, he was only a big boy. The most serious part of his preparation for life lay just ahead of him. If he didn't go to college . . .

And even more pressing than that consideration was the fact that in bringing Maisie to The Cherry Tree that afternoon he had come down to his last fifteen cents. At the beginning of their acquaintance he had had seven dollars and a half, hoarded precious for needs connected with his education. Maisie had stampeded the whole treasure. To expect a man to spend money on her was as instinctive to Maisie as it is to a flower to expect the heavens to send rain.

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She knew that at each mention of the movies or The Cherry Tree Tom squirmed in the anguish of financial disability, and that from the very hint of love he bolted like a colt from the bridle; but when it came to what she considered as her due she was pitiless.

No epic has yet been written on the woes of the young man trying, on twenty-five dollars a week, let us say, to play up to the American girl's taste for spending money. His self-denials, his sordid shifts, his mortifications, his sense at times that his most unselfish efforts have been scorned, might inspire a series of episodes as tensely dramatic as those of Spoon River.

Tom had had one such experience on Maisie's birthday. She had talked so much of her birthday that a present became indispensable. To meet this necessity the extreme of his expenditure could be no more than fifty cents. To find for fifty cents something worthy of a lady already a connoisseur he ransacked Boston. Somewhere he had heard that a present might be modest so long as it was the best thing of its kind. The best thing of its kind he discovered was a toothbrush. It was not a common toothbrush except for the part that brushed the teeth. The handle was of mother-of-pearl, with an inlay in red enamel. The price was forty-five cents.

Maisie laughed till she cried. "A toothbrush! A *toothbrush!* For a present that's something new! Gee, how the girls'll laff when I go back to Nashua and tell them that that's what a guy give me in Boston!"

The humiliation of straitened means was the more

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galling to Tom Whitelaw, first because he was a giver, and then because he knew the value of money. With the value of money his mind was always playing, not from miserly motives, but from those of social economy. Each time he "blew in," as he called it, a dollar on the girl he said to himself: "If I could have invested that dollar, it would have helped to run a factory, and have brought me in six or seven cents a year for all the rest of my life." He made this calculation to mark the wastage he was strewing along his path in the wild pace he was running.

There was something about Maisie which obliged you to play up to her. She was that sort of girl. If you didn't play up, the mere laughter in her eye made you feel your lack of the manly qualities. It was not her scorn she brought into play; it was her sense of fun; but to the boy of sixteen her sense of fun was terrible.

It was terrible, and yet it put him on his guard. He couldn't wholly give in to her. If she could make moves he could make them too, and perhaps as adroitly. Her tantalizing question was ringing in his ears: If he was going to take a shine to any girl—what of it?

"Oh, if I was going to do that," he tossed off, "it would be to you."

"So that you haven't taken a shine to me—yet?"

"It depends on what you mean by a shine."

"What do you mean by it yourself?"

"I never have time to think." This was a happy

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sentiment, and a safeguard. "It takes all I can do to remember that I've got to go to college."

"Damn college!"

He was so unsophisticated that the expression startled him. He hadn't supposed young ladies used it, not any more than they sneaked into barns or under bridges to smoke cigarettes.

"What's the use of damning college, when I've got to go?"

"You haven't got to go. A great strong fella like you ought to be earning his twenty per by this time. If you've got money in the bank, as you say you have . . ."

He trembled already for his treasure. "I haven't got it here. It's in a savings bank in New York."

"Oh, that's nothing! If you got it *anywheres* you can get at it with a check. Gee, if I had a few hundreds I'd have ten in my pocket at a time, I'll be hanged if I wouldn't. I don't believe you've got it, see. I know a lot o' guys that loves to put that sort of fluff over on a girl. Makes 'em feel big. But if they only knew what the girl thinks of them . . ." She jumped to her feet, allowing herself a little more vulgarity than she generally showed. "All right, old son, c'me awn! Let's have another twist. And for Gawd's sake don't bring down that hoof of yours till I get a chance to pull my Cinderella-slipper out of your way."

XXVI

IT was after he had spent the first ten dollars he drew from his fund in New York that Tom felt the impulse to tell Honey of the way in which he was becoming involved with Maisie Danker. The ten-dollars had melted. In signing the formalities for drawing the amount, he expected to have enough to carry him along till spring, when Maisie's visit was to end. He dreaded its ending, and yet it would have this element of relief in it; he would be able to keep his money. At a pinch he could spare ten dollars, though he couldn't spare them very well. More than ten dollars . . .

And before he knew it the ten dollars had vanished as if into air. Once Maisie knew what he had done her caprices multiplied. To her as to him ten dollars to "blow in"—she used the airy expression too—was a small fortune. It was only their instincts that were different. His was to let it go slowly, since the spending of a penny was against the protests of his conscience; hers to make away with it. If Tom could "draw the juice" for a first ten, he could draw it for a second, and for a third and a fourth after that. It was not extravagance that whipped her on; it was joy of life.

Tom's impulse to tell Honey was not acted on. It was not acted on after he drew the second ten; nor

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after he drew the third. After he had drawn the fourth his unhappiness became so great that he sought a confidant.

And yet his unhappiness was not absolute; it was rather a poisoned bliss. Had Maisie been content with what he could afford, the winter would have been like one in Paradise. But almost before he himself was aware of the promptings of thrift, she vanquished them with her ridicule.

“There’s nothing I hate so much as anything cheap. If a fella can’t give me what I like, he can keep away.”

Time and time again Tom swore he would keep away. He did keep away, for a day, for two or three days in succession. Then she would meet him in the dark hallway, and, twining her arms around his neck without a word, would give him one of those kisses on the lips which thrilled him into subjection. He would be guilty of any folly for her then, because he couldn’t help himself. Ten, twenty, thirty, forty dollars, all the hoarded inheritance from the Martin Quidmore who was already a dim memory, would be well thrown away if only she would kiss him once again.

He lost the healthy diversion which might have reached him through the Ansleys because they had taken the fat boy to Florida. Tom learned that from little Miss Ansley a few days after the return of the father and mother from New York. One afternoon as both were coming from their schools they had met on their way toward Louisburg Square. Even in her outdoor dress, she was quaintly grown-up and

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Cambodian. A rough brown tweed had a little gold and a little red in it; a brown turban not unlike a fez bore on the left a small red wing tipped with a golden line. Maisie would have emphasized the red; she would have been vivid, eager to be noticed. This girl didn't need that kind of advertisement.

Seeing her before she saw him, he wondered whether she would give him any sign of recognition. At Harfrey the girls whom he saw at the Tollivants, and who proclaimed themselves "exclusive," always forgot him when they met him on the street. This had hurt him. He waited in some trepidation now, fearing to be hurt again. But when she saw him she nodded and smiled.

"Guy's better," she said, without greeting, "and we're all going off to Florida to-morrow. Guy and I don't want to go a bit; but mother's afraid of his catching cold, and father has to be in Washington, anyhow. So we're off."

Though he walked by her side for no more than a few yards, Tom was touched by her friendliness. She was the first girl of that section of the world for which he had only the term "society" who had not been ashamed to be seen with him in a street. Little Miss Ansley even paused for a minute at the foot of her steps while they exchanged remarks about their schools. She went to Miss Winslow's. She liked her school. She was sorry to be going away as it would give her such a lot of back work to make up. She might go to Radcliffe when Guy went to Harvard, but so far her mother was opposed to it. In these casual observations she seemed to Tom to

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lose something of her air of being a woman of the world. On his own side he lost a little of his awe of her.

The snuffing out of this interest threw him back on the easing of his heart by confidence. It was not confidence alone; it was also confession. He was deceiving Honey, and to go on deceiving Honey began to seem to him baser than dishonor. Had Honey been his father, it would have been different. Fathers worked for their sons as a matter of course, and almost as a matter of course expected that their sons would play them false. There was no reason why Honey should work for him; and since Honey did work for him, there was every reason why he who reaped the benefit should be loyal. He was not loyal. He had even reached the point, and he cursed himself for reaching it, at which Honey was an Old Man of the Sea fastened on his back.

He told himself that this was the damndest ingratitude; and yet he couldn't tell himself that it wasn't so. It was. There were days when Honey's way of speaking, Honey's way of eating, the smell of Honey's person, and the black patch on his eye, revolted him. Here he was, a great lump of a fellow sixteen years of age, and dependent for everything, for *everything*, on a rough dock laborer who had been a burglar and a convict. It was preposterous. Had he jumped into this situation he would not have borne it for a week. But he had not jumped into it; it had grown. It had grown round him. It held him now as if with tentacles. He couldn't break away from it.

And yet Honey and he were bound to grow apart.

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It was in the nature of the case that it should be so. Always of a texture finer than Honey's, schooling, association, and habits of mind were working together to refine the grain, while Honey was growing coarser. His work, Tom reasoned, kept him not only in a rut but in a brutalizing rut. Loading and unloading, unloading and re-loading, he had less use for his mind than in the days of his freebooting. Then a wild ass of the desert, he was now harnessed to a dray with no relief from hauling it. From morning to night he hauled; from night to morning he was stupefied with weariness. In on this stupefaction Tom found it more and more difficult to break. He was agog with interests and ideas; for neither interests nor ideas had Honey any room.

Nor had he, so far as Tom could judge, any room for affection. On the contrary, he repelled it. "Don't you go for to think that I've give up bein' a socialist because I got a soft side. No, sir! That wouldn't be it at all. What reely made me do it was because it didn't pay. I'd make big money now and then; but once I'd fixed the police, the lawyers, and nine times out o' ten the judge, I wouldn't have hardly nothink for meself. If out o' every hundred dollars I was able to pocket twenty-five it'd be as much as ever. This 'ere job don't pay as well to start with; but then it haven't no expenses."

Self-interest and a vague sense of responsibility were all he ever admitted as a key to his benevolence. "It's along o' my bein' an Englishman. You can't get an Englishman 'ardly ever to be satisfied a'mindin' of his own business. Ten to one he'll do that and

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mind somebody else's at the same time. A kind o' curse that's on 'em, I often thinks. Once when I was doin' a bit—might 'a been at Sing Sing—a guy come along to entertain us. Recited poetry at us. And I recolleck he chewed to beat the band over a piece he called, 'The White Man's Burden.' Well, that's what you are, Kid. You're my White Man's Burden. I can't chuck yer, nor nothink. I just got to carry yer till yer can git along without me; and then I'll quit. The old bunch'll be as glad to see me back as I'll be to go. There's just one thing I want yer to remember, Kid, that when yer've got yer eddication there won't be nothink to bind me to you, nor—" he held himself very straight, bringing out his words with a brutal firmness—" *nor you to me*. Yer'll know I'll be as glad to go the one way as you'll be to go the t'other, so there won't be no 'ard feelin' on both sides."

It was a Sunday night. Tom had taken his troubles to bed with him, because he had nowhere else to take them. In bed you struck a truce with life. You suspended operations, at least for a few hours. You could sleep; you could postpone. He slept as a rule so soundly, and so straight through the night, that, hunted as he was by care, he had once in the twenty-four hours a refuge in which the fiendish thing couldn't overtake him.

It had been a trying Sunday because Maisie had tempted him to a wilder than usual extravagance. There was enough snow on the ground for sleighing. She had been used to sleighing in Nashua. The sing-

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ing of runners and the jingling of bells, as a sleigh slid joyously past her, awakened her longing for the sport. By coaxing, by teasing, by crying a little, and, worst of all, by making game of him, she had induced him to find a place where he could hire a sleigh and take her for a ride.

Snow having turned to rain, and rain to frost, the landscape through which they drove was made of crystal. Every tree was as a tree of glass, sparkling in the sun. A deep blue sky, a keen dry wind, a little horse which enjoyed the outing as briskly as Maisie herself, made the two hours vibrant with the ecstasy of cold. All Tom's nerves were taut with the pleasure of the motion, of the air, of the skill, acquired chiefly at Bere, with which he managed the spirited young nag. The knowledge of what it was costing him he was able to thrust aside. He would enjoy the moment, and face the reckoning afterward. When he did face the reckoning, he found that of his fourth ten dollars he had spent six dollars and fifty-seven cents. Only three days earlier he had had the crisp clean bill unbroken in his hand. . . .

He had been hardly able to eat his supper, and after supper the usual two hours of study to which he gave himself on Sunday nights were as time thrown away. Luckily, Honey's consideration left him the room to himself. Honey was like that. If Tom had to work, Honey effaced himself, in summer by sitting on the doorstep, in winter by going to bed. Much of Tom's wrestling with Virgil was carried on to the tune of Honey's snores.

This being Sunday evening, and Honey less tired

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than on the days on which he worked, he had gone to "chew the rag," as he phrased it, with a little Jew tailor, who lived next door to Mrs. Danker. Tom was aware that behind this the motive was not love for the Jew tailor, but zeal that he, Tom, should be interfered with as little as possible in his eddication. Tom's eddication was as much an obsession to Honey as it was to Tom himself. It was an overmastering compulsion, like that which sent Peary to find the North Pole, Scott to find the South one, and Livingstone and Stanley to cross Africa. What he had to gain by it had no place in his calculation. A machine wound up, and going automatically, could not be more set on its purpose than Lemuel Honeybun on his.

But to-night his absenting of himself was of no help to Tom in giving his mind to the translation from English into Latin on which he was engaged. When he found himself rendering the expression "in the meantime" by the words *in turpe tempore*, he pushed books and paper away from him, with a bitter, emphatic, "Damn!"

Though it was only nine, there was nothing for it but to go to bed. In bed he would sleep and forget. He always did. Putting out the gas, and pulling the bedclothes up around his ears, he mentally waved the white flag to his carking enemy.

But the carking enemy didn't heed the white flag; he came on just the same. For the first time in his life Tom Whitelaw couldn't sleep. Rolling from side to side, he groaned and swore at the refusal of relief to come to him. He was still wide awake when about

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half past ten Honey came in and re-lit the gas, surprised to see the boy already with his face turned to the wall. Not to disturb him, Honey moved round the room on tiptoe.

Tom lay still, his eyes closed. He loathed this proximity, this sharing of one room. In the two previous years he hadn't minded it. But he was older now, almost a man, able to take care of himself. Not only was he growing more fastidious, but the self-consciousness we know as modesty was bringing to the over-intimate a new kind of discomfort. Long meaning to propose two small separate rooms as not much dearer than the larger one, he had not yet come to it, partly through unwillingness to add anything to their expenses, and partly through fear of hurting Honey's feelings. But to-night the lack of privacy gave the outlet of exasperation to his less tangible discontents.

He rolled over on his back. One gas jet spluttered in the antiquated chandelier. Under it a small deal table was heaped with his books and strewn with his papers. Beside it stood an old armchair stained with the stains of many lodgers' use, the entrails of the seat protruding horribly between the legs. Two small chairs of the kitchen type, a wash-stand, a chest of drawers with a mirror hung above it, two or three flimsy rugs, and the iron cots on which they slept, made a setting for Honey, who sat beneath the gas-light, sewing a button on his undershirt. Turned in profile toward Tom, and wearing nothing but his drawers and socks, he bent above his work with the patience of a concentrated mind. He was really a fine

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figure of a man, brawny, hairy, spare, muscled like an athlete, a Rodin's Thinker all but the thought, yet irritating Tom as the embodiment of this penury.

So not from an impulse of confession, but to ease the suffering of his nerves, Tom told something about Maisie Danker. It was only something. He told of the friendship, of the dancing lessons, of the movies, of the sleigh-ride that afternoon, of the forty dollars drawn from the bank. He said nothing of their kisses, nor of the frenzy which he thought might be love. Honey pulled his needle up through the hole, and pushed it back again, neither asking questions nor looking up.

"I guess we'll move," was his only comment, when the boy had finished the halting tale.

This quietness excited Tom the more. "What do you want to move for?"

"Because there's dangers what the on'y thing you can do to fight 'em is to run away."

"Who said anything about danger? Do you suppose . . .?"

In sticking in his needle Honey handled the implement as if it were an awl. "Do I suppose she's playin' the dooce with yer? No, Kid. She don't have to. You're playin' the dooce with yerself. It's yer age. Sixteen is a terr'ble imagination age."

"Oh, if you think I'm framing the whole thing . . ."

"No, I don't. Yer believes it all right. On'y it ain't quite so bad as what yer think. It don't do to be too delikit with women. Got to bat 'em away as if they was flies, when they bother yer too much.

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Once let a woman in on yer game and yer 'and can be queered for good."

"Did I say anything about letting a woman in on my game?"

"No, yer on'y said she'd slipped in. It's too late now to keep her out. She's made the diff'rence."

"What difference?"

Honey threaded his needle laboriously, held up the end of the thread to moisten it with his lips, and tied a knot in it. "The diff'rence in you. Yer ain't the same young feller what yer was six months ago. You and me has been like one," he went on, placidly. "Now we're two. Been two this spell back. Couldn't make it out, no more'n Billy-be-damned; and now I see. The first girl."

Tom lashed about the bed.

"It was bound to come; and that's why—yer've arsked me about it onst or twice, so I may as well tell yer—that's why I never lets meself get fond o' yer. Could 'a did it just as easy as not. When a man gits to my age a young boy what's next o' kin to him—why, he'll seem like as if 'twould be his son. But I wouldn't be ketched. 'Honey,' I says to meself, 'the first girl and you'll be dished.' "

"Oh, go to blazes!"

Having finished his button, Honey made it doubly secure by winding the thread around it. "Not that I blame yer, Kiddy. I ain't never led no celebrant life meself, not till I had to take you on, and cut out all low company what wouldn't 'a been good for you. But I figured it out that we might 'a got yer through college before yer fell for it. Well, we ain't. Maybe

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now we'll not git yer to college at all. But we'll make a shy at it. We'll move."

"If you think that by moving you'll keep me from seeing her again . . ."

"No, son, not no more'n I could keep yer from cuttin' yer throat by lockin' up yer razor. Yer could git another razor. I know that. All the same, it'd be up to me, wouldn't it, not to leave no razors layin' round the room, where yer could put yer 'and on 'em?"

This settling of his destiny over his head angered Tom especially.

"I can save you the trouble of having me on your mind any more. To-morrow I'll be out on my own. I'm going to be a man."

"Sure, you're going to be a man—in time. But yer ain't a man yet."

"I'm sixteen. I can do what any other fellow of sixteen can do."

"No fella of sixteen can do much."

"He can earn a living."

"He can earn part of a livin'. How many boys of sixteen did yer ever know that could swing clear of home and friends and everythink, and feed and clothe and launder theirselves on what they made out'n their job?"

"Well, I can try, can't I?"

"Oh, yes, yer can try, Kid. But if you was me, I wouldn't cut loose from nobody, not till I'd got me 'and in."

Tom raised himself on his elbow, his eyes, beneath

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their protruding horizontal eyebrows, aglitter with the wrath which puts life and the world out of focus.

"I *am* going to cut loose. I'm going to be my own master."

"Are you, Kid? How much of yer own master do yer expect to be, on the ten or twelve per yer'll git to begin with—if yer gits that?"

"Even if it was only five or six per, I'd be making it myself."

"And what about college?"

"College—hell!"

The boy fell back on his pillow. Feeling he had delivered his ultimatum, he waited for a reply. But Honey only stowed away his sewing materials in a little black box, after which he pulled off the articles of clothing he continued to wear, and set about his toilet for the night. At the sound of his splashing water on his face Tom muttered to himself: "God, another night of this will kill me."

Honey spoke through the muffling of the towel, while he dried his face. "Isn't all this fuss what I'm tellin' yer? The minute a girl gits in on a young feller's life there's hell to pay. That's why I'd like yer to steer clear of 'em as long as yer can hold out."

Tom shut his eyes, buried his face in the pillow, and affected not to hear.

"They don't mean to do no harm; they're just naterally troublesome. Seems as if they was born that way, and couldn't 'elp theirselves. There's a lot of 'em as is never satisfied till they've got a man like a jumpin'-jack, what all they need to do is to pull

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the string to make him jig. This girl is one o' them kind."

Tom continued to hold his peace.

"I've saw her. Pretty little thing she is all right. But give her two or three years. Lord love you, Kid, she'll be as washed out then as one of her own ribbons after a hard rain. And yet them is the kind that most young fellers'll run after, like a pup'll run after a squirrel."

Tom was startled. The figure of speech had been used to him before. He could hear it drawled in a tired voice, soft and velvety. It was queer what conclusions about women these grown men came to! Quidmore had thought them as dangerous as Honey, and warned him against them much as Honey was doing now. Mrs. Quidmore had once been what Maisie was at that minute, and yet as he, Tom, remembered her . . . But Honey was going on again, spluttering his words as he brushed his teeth.

"It can be awful easy to git mixed up with a girl, and awful hard to git unmixed. She'll put a man in a hole where he can't help doin' somethink foolish, and then make out as what she've got a claim on him. There's a lot o' talk about women bein' the prey o' men; but for one woman as I've ever saw that way I've saw a hundred men as was the prey o' women. Now when a girl of eighteen gits a young boy like you to spend the money as he's saved for his eddication . . ."

The boy sprang up in bed, hammering the bedclothes. "Don't you say anything against her. I won't listen to it."

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With that supple tread which always made Tom think of one who could easily slip through windows, Honey walked to the closet where he kept his night-shirt. "Tain't nothink agin her, Kid. Was on'y goin' to say that a girl what'll git a young boy to do that shows what she is. And yer did spend the money a-takin' her about, now didn't yer?"

Tom fell back upon his pillow. Putting out the gas, Honey threw himself on his creaking cot.

"You're a free boy, Kiddy," he went on, while arranging the sheet and blanket as he liked them. "If yer wants to beat it to-morrer, beat it away. Don't stop because yer'll be afraid I'll miss yer. Wasn't never no hand for missin' no one, and don't mean to begin. What I'd 'a liked 'd have been to fill yer up with eddication so that yer could jaw to beat the best of 'em, if yer turned out to be the Whitelaw baby."

Tom had almost forgotten who the Whitelaw baby was. Not since that Sunday afternoon nearly three years ago had Honey ever mentioned him. The memory having come back, he made an inarticulate sound of impatience, finally snuggling to sleep.

He tried to think of Maisie, to conjure up the rose in her cheeks, the laughter in her eyes; but all he saw, as he drifted into dreams, was the quaint Cambodian face of little Hildred Ansley. Only once did Honey speak again, muttering, as he too fell asleep:

"We'll move."

XXVII

THEY did not move for the reason that Maisie did. Not for forty-eight hours did Tom learn of her departure. As Mrs. Danker kept not a boarding house but a rooming house, and her guests went days at a time without seeing their landlady, he had no sources of information when Maisie, as she sometimes did, kept herself out of sight. Watching for her on the Monday and the Tuesday following his Sunday night talk with Honey, he thought it strange that she never appeared in the hallway, though he had no cause to be alarmed. He was going to leave Honey, get a job, and be independent. When he had added a little more to his fund in New York, he would propose to Maisie, and marry her if she would take him. He would be eighteen, perhaps nineteen by the time he was able to do this, an early, but not an impossible, age at which to be a husband.

On both these days he had gone to school from force of habit, but on the Wednesday he was surprised by a letter. Though he had never seen Maisie's writing, the postmark said Nashua. Before tearing the envelope he had a premonition of her flight.

A telegram on Monday morning had bidden her come home at once, as her stepmother was dying. She had died. Till her father married again, which she supposed would be soon, she would have to care for

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the four little brothers and sisters. That was all. On paper Maisie was laconic.

Since his mother's death no revolution in his inner life had upset the boy like this. The Tollivant experience had only left him a little hard and skeptical; that with the Quidmores had passed like the rain and the snow, scarcely affecting him. With Honey his need for affection had always been unfed, and for reasons he could not fathom. Maisie had made the give and take of life easy, natural. She had her limitations, her crude, and sometimes her cruel, insistences; but she liked him. He loved her. He was ready to say it now, because of the blank her loss had hollowed in his life. For the unformed, growing hot-blooded human thing to have nothing on which to spend itself is anguish. Sitting down at his deal table, he wrote to her out of a heart fuller and more passionate than poor Maisie could ever have understood.

All he had been planning in rebellion against fate he poured out now as devotion. He had meant to cut loose, to go to work, to live on nothing, to save his money, and be ready to marry her in a year or two. And yet, on second thoughts, if he went through college, their position in the end would be so much better that perhaps the original plan was the best one. He thought only of her, and of what would make her happiest. He loved her—loved her—loved her.

Maisie wrote back that she saw no harm in their being engaged, and she wouldn't press him for a ring till he felt himself able to give her one. For herself she didn't care, but if she told the girls she was

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engaged to a fellow, and had no ring to corroborate her word, she wouldn't be believed. In case he ever felt equal to the purchase she was sending him the size in the circlet of thread inclosed.

Tom was heroic. He had never thought of a ring, and a ring would mean more money. Be it so! He would spend more money. He would spend more money if he mortgaged his whole future to procure it. Maisie should not be shamed among her friends in Nashua.

Giving all his free hours to wandering about and pricing rings, he found them less expensive than he feared. Maisie having once confided to him her longing for a diamond, a diamond he meant to make it if it cost him fifty dollars. But he found one for twenty, as big as a small pea, and flashing in the sunshine like a lighthouse. The young Jew who sold it assured him that it would have cost a hundred, except for a tiny flaw which only an expert could detect. On its reception Maisie was delighted. He felt himself almost a married man.

The rest of the winter went by peaceably. With Honey he declared a truce of God. He would go to college, and live up to all that had been planned; but Honey must look on his own self-sacrifice as of the nature of a loan which would be repaid. Honey was ready to promise anything, while, in the hope of getting through college in three years instead of four, Tom worked with increased zeal. Then, one day, when spring had come round, he stumbled on Guy and Hildred Ansley.

It was in Louisburg Square, as usual. Having

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arrived from the south the night before, they were sailing soon for Europe.

"Rotten luck!" the fat boy complained. "Got to trail a tutor along too, so that I shan't fall down on the Harvard exam when it comes. Wish I was you."

"If you were Mr. Whitelaw, Guy," his sister reminded him, "you'd find something else to worry you. We all have our troubles, haven't we, Mr. Whitelaw?"

"She's got nothing to worry her," the brother protested. "If she was me, with mother scared all the time that I'll be too hot or too cold or too tired or too hungry, or that some damn thing or other'll make me sick . . ."

"All the same," Tom broke in, "it's something to have a mother to make a fuss."

The girl looked sympathetic. "You haven't, have you?"

"Oh, I get along."

"Guy says you live with a guardian."

"You may call him a guardian if you like, but the word is too big. You only have a guardian when you've something to guard, and I haven't anything."

"Yes, but how did you ever . . .?"

Once more Tom said to himself, "It's the way she looks at you." He knew what she was trying to ask him, and in order to be open and aboveboard, he gave her the few main facts of his life. He did it briefly, hurriedly, throwing emphasis only on the point that, to keep him from becoming a State ward the second time, his stevedore friend had brought him to Boston and sent him to school.

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“He must be an awfully good man!”

He was going to tell her that he was when the brother gave the talk another twist.

“What are you going to do in your holidays?”

“Work, if I can find a job.”

“What kind of job?”

He explained that for the last two summers he had worked round the Quincy and Faneuil Hall markets, but that he had outgrown them. A two-fisted, he-man’s job was what he would look for now, and had no doubt that he would get it.

“After you’ve left Harvard what are you going to be?”

“Banking’s what I’d like best, but most likely I’ll have to make it barbering. What are you going to be yourself?”

“Oh, I’ve got to be a corporation lawyer. My luck! Just because dad’ll have the business to take me into.”

“But what would you like better?”

The piggy face broke into one of its captivating grins. “Hanged if I know, unless it’d be an orphan and an only child.”

The meeting was important because of what it led to. A few days later Tom heard the wheezy girl-ish voice calling behind him in the street: “Tom! Tom!”

He turned and walked back. During the winter the fat boy had expanded, not so much in height as in girth and jelliness. He came up, puffing from his run.

“Can you drive a car?”

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Tom hesitated. "I don't know that you'd call it driving a car. I can drive—after a fashion. Mr. Quidmore used to let me run his Ford, when we were alone in it, and no one was looking. Since then I've sometimes driven the market delivery teams for a block or two, nothing much, just to see what it was like. I know I could pick it up with a few lessons. I'm a natural driver—a horse or anything. Why?"

"Because my old man said that if you could drive, he might help you get your summer's job."

"Where? What kind of job?"

"I don't know. He said that if you wanted to talk it over to come round to our house this evening at nine o'clock."

At nine that evening Tom was shown up into another of those rooms which marked the gulf between his own way of living and that of people like the Ansleys, and at the same time woke the atavistic pang. His impression was only a blurred one of comfort, color, shaded lights, and richness. From the many books he judged that it was what they would call the library, but any judgment was subconscious because the human presences came first. A man wearing a dinner jacket and scanning an evening paper was sunk into one deep armchair; in another a lady, demi-décolletée, was reading a book. It was his first intimation that people ever wore what he called "dress-clothes" when dining only with their families.

He was announced by Pilcher, who had led him upstairs. "This is the young man, sir."

Having reached something like friendly terms with

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the son and daughter, Tom had expected from the parents the kind of courtesy shown to strangers when you shake hands with them and ask them to sit down. Mr. Ansley only let the paper drop to his knees with an "Oh!" in response to the butler, and looked up.

"You're the young fellow my son has spoken of. He tells me you can drive a car."

Repeating what he had already said to Guy as to his experience with cars, Tom expressed confidence in his ability to obtain a license, if it should become worth his while.

"It wouldn't be difficult driving such as you get in the crowded parts of a city. It would be chiefly station work, over country roads."

He explained himself further. In the New Hampshire summer colony where the Ansleys had their place, the residents were turning a large country house into an inn which would be like a club, or a club which would be like an inn. It would not be open to ordinary travelers, since ordinary travelers would bring in people whom they didn't want. The guests would be their own friends, duly invited or introduced. He, Mr. Ansley, was chairman of the motor-car committee, but as he was going to Europe he was taking up the matter in advance. On general grounds he would have preferred an older man and one with more experience, but the inn-club was a new undertaking and not too well financed. More experienced men would cost more money. For the station work they could afford but eighty dollars a month, with a room in the garage, and board. Moreover, the jobs they could offer being only for the summer,

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the promoters hoped that a few young men and women working for their own education might take advantage of the scheme.

Eighty dollars a month, with a room to himself, even if it had only been in a stable, and board in addition, glittered before Tom's eyes like Aladdin's treasure house. Having thanked Mr. Ansley for the kind suggestion, he assured him he could give satisfaction if taken on. All the chauffeurs who had let him have a few minutes at the steering-wheel had told him that he possessed the eye, the nerve, and the quickness which make a good driver, in addition to which he knew that he did himself.

"How old are you?"

It was a question Tom always found difficult to answer. He could remember when his birthday had been on the fifth of March; but his mother had told him that that had been Gracie's birthday, and had changed his own to September. Later she had shifted to May, to a day, so she told him, when all the nurses had had their children in the Park, and the lilacs had been in bloom. He had never asked her the year, not having come to reckoning in years before she was taken from him. Though latterly he had been putting his birthday in May, he now shifted back to March, so as to make himself older.

"I'm seventeen, sir."

Mrs. Ansley spoke for the first time. "He looks more than that, doesn't he?"

Tom turned to the lady who filled a large arm-chair with a person suggesting the quaking, flabby

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consistency of corn-starch pudding. "I suppose that's because I've knocked about so much."

"The hard school does give you experience, doesn't it, but it's a cruel school."

He remembered his promise to Guy, if ever he got the opportunity. "Boys can stand a good deal of cruelty, ma'am. Nine times out of ten it does them good."

"Still there's always a tenth case."

He smiled. "I think I ought to have made it ten times out of ten. I never saw the boy yet who wasn't all the better for fighting his way along."

Mrs. Ansley's mouth screwed itself up like Guy's when it looked as if he were going to cry. "Fight? Why, I think fighting's something horrid. Why *can't* boys treat each other like gentlemen?"

"I suppose, ma'am, because they're not gentlemen."

The cornstarch pudding stiffened to the firmness of ice-cream. "Excuse me! My boy couldn't be anything but a gentleman."

"He couldn't be anything but a sport. He *is* a fighter, ma'am—when he gets the chance."

"Then I hope he won't often get it."

"But, Sunshine," Mr. Ansley intervened, "you don't make any allowance for differences in standards. You're a woman of forty-five. Guy's a boy of sixteen—he's practically seventeen, like Whitelaw here—your name is Whitelaw, isn't it?—and yet you want him to have the same tastes and ways as yourself."

"I don't want him to have brutal tastes and ways."

"It's a pretty brutal world, ma'am, and if he's going

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to take his place he'll have to get used to being hammered and hammering back."

"Which is what I object to. If you train boys to be courteous with each other from the start . . ."

"They'll be quite ladylike when they get into the stock exchange or the prize ring. Look here, Sunshine! The country's over feminized as it is. It's run by women, or by men who think as women, or by men who're afraid of women. Congress is full of them; the courts are full of them; the churches—the churches above all!—are full of them; and you'd make it worse. If Guy hadn't the stuff in him that he has . . ."

Mrs. Ansley was more than ever like a cornstarch pudding, quivering and undulating, when she rose. "You make it very hard for me, Philip. I was going to ask Whitelaw, here, if when he's anywhere where Guy is—I know Guy will have to go among young men, of course—he'd keep an eye on him, and protect him."

"He doesn't need protection, ma'am. He can take his own part as easily as I can take mine. If there's a row he likes to be in it; and if he's licked he doesn't mind it. If he only had a chance . . ."

She raised her left hand palm outward, in a gesture of protest. "Thank you! I'm not asking advice as to my own son."

Sailing from the room with the circumambient dignity of ladies when they wore the crinoline, she left Tom with the crestfallen sense of presumption. Half expecting to be ordered from the room, he turned toward his host, who, however, simply reverted to

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the subject of the summer. He told Tom where he could have lessons in driving, adding that he would charge them to club expenses, as he would the uniform Tom would have to wear. When Mr. Ansley picked up his paper the young man knew the interview was over. With a half-articulate, "Good-night, sir," to which there was no response, he turned and left the room.

The occasion left him with much to think of, chiefly on his own account. It marked his status more clearly than anything that had happened to him yet. He had not been shaken hands with; he had not been asked to sit down. He had not been greeted on arriving; his "good-night" had not been acknowledged when he went away. Mr. Ansley had called him Whitelaw, which was all very well; but when Mrs. Ansley did it, the use of the name was significant. This must be the way in which rich people treated their servants.

Here he had to reason with himself as to what he had been looking for. It was not for recognition on a footing of equality. Of course not! He had no objection to being a servant, since he needed the money. He objected to . . . and yet it was not quite tangible. He didn't mind standing up; he didn't mind the absence of a greeting; he didn't mind any one thing in itself. He minded the combination of assumptions, all fusing into one big assumption that he was in essence their inferior. Having this assumption so strongly in their minds, they couldn't but betray it when they spoke to him.

With his tendency to think things out, he mulled

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for the next few days over the question of inferiority. Why was one man inferior to another? What made him so? Did nature send him into the world as an inferior, or did the world turn him into an inferior after he had come into it? Did God have any part in it? Was it God's will that there should be a class system among mankind, with class animosities, class warfares?

Of the latter he was hearing a good deal. In Grove Street, with its squirming litters of idealistic Jews and Slavs, class warfare was much talked about. Sometimes Tom heard the talk himself; sometimes Honey brought in reports of it. It was a rare day, especially a rare night, when some wild-eyed apostle was not going up or down the hill with a gospel which would have made old Boston, only a few hundred yards away, shiver in its bed on hearing it. To a sturdy American like Tom, and a sturdy Englishman like Honey, these whispered prophecies and plans were no more than the twitter of sparrows going to roost. But now that the boy was working toward man's estate, and had always, within his recollection, been treated as an inferior, he found himself wondering on what principle the treatment had been based. He would listen more attentively when the Jew tailor next door to Mrs. Danker began again, as he had so often, to set forth his arguments in favor of dragging the upper classes down. He would listen when Honey cursed the lor of propuppy. He had long been asking himself if in some obscure depth of Honey's obscure intelligence there might not be a glimmer of a great big thing that was Right.

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He had reached the age, which generally comes a little before the twenties, when the Right and Wrong of things puzzled and disturbed him. No longer able to accept Rights and Wrongs on somebody else's verdict, he was without a test or a standard of his own. He began to wander among churches. Here, he had heard, all these questions had been long ago threshed out, and the answers reduced to formulæ.

His range was wide, Hebrew, Catholic, Protestant. For the most part the services bewildered him. He couldn't make out why they were services, or what they were serving. The sermons he found platitudinous. They told him what in the main he knew already, and said little or nothing of the great fundamental things with which his mind had been intermittently busy ever since the days when he used to talk them over with Bertie Tollivant.

But one new interest he drew from them. The fragments of the gospels he heard read from altar or lectern or pulpit roused his curiosity. Passages were familiar from having learned them at the knee, so to speak, of Mrs. Tollivant. But they had been incoherent, without introduction or sequence. He was surprised to find how little he knew of the most dominant character in history.

On his way home one day he passed a shop given to the sale of Bibles. Deciding to buy a cheap New Testament, he was advised by the salesman to take a modern translation. That night, after he had finished his lessons, and Honey was asleep, he opened it.

It opened at a page of St. Luke. Turning to the beginning of that gospel, he started to read it through.

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He read avidly, charmed, amazed, appeased, and pacified. When he came to an incident bearing on himself he stopped.

“Now one of the Pharisees repeatedly invited Him to a meal at his house. So He entered the house and reclined at the table. And there was a woman in the town who was a notorious sinner. Having learnt that Jesus was at table in the Pharisee’s house she brought a flask of perfume, and standing behind, close to His feet, weeping, began to wet His feet with her tears; and with her hair she wiped the tears away again, while she lovingly kissed His feet, and poured the perfume over them.

“Noticing this the Pharisee, His host, said to himself:

“‘This man, if He were really a prophet, would know who and what sort of person this is who is touching Him, for she is an immoral woman.’

“In answer to his thoughts Jesus said to him: ‘Simon, I have a word to say to you.’

“‘Rabbi, say on,’ he replied.

“‘Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You gave me no water for my feet; but she has made my feet wet with her tears, and then wiped the tears away with her hair. No kiss did you give me; but she, from the moment I came in, has not left off tenderly kissing my feet. No oil did you pour even on my head; but she has poured perfume on my feet. This is the reason why I tell you that her sins—her *many* sins—are forgiven—because she has loved much.’

He shut the book with something of a bang. “So

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they used to do that sort of thing even then! . . . The water for the feet, and the kiss, and the oil, must have corresponded to our shaking hands and asking people to sit down. . . . And they wouldn't show Him the courtesy. . . . He was their inferior. . . . I wonder if He minded it . . . It looks as if He did because of the way He had it in His mind, and referred to it. . . . If the woman hadn't turned up He would probably not have referred to it at all. . . . He would have kept it to Himself . . . without resentment. . . . The little disdains of little people were too petty for Him to resent. . . . He could only be hurt by them . . . but on their account."

He sat late into the night, thinking, thinking. Suddenly he thumped the table, and sprang up. "I *won't* resent it. They're good people in their way. They don't mean any unkindness. It's only that they think like everybody else. Honey would call them orthodox. They're courteous among themselves; they only don't know how far courtesy can be made to go. They're—they're little. I'll be big—like Him."

XXVIII

THE resolution helped him through the summer. It was a pleasant summer, and yet a trying one. It was the first time he had ever done work of which the essence lay in satisfying individuals. In his market jobs the job had been the thing. Even if done at somebody's order, it was judged by its success, or by its lack of it. His work at the inn-club brought him hourly into contact with men and women to whom it was his duty to be specially, and outwardly deferential. He sprang to open the door for them when they entered or left the car; he touched his hat to them whenever they gave him an order. His bearing, his manner of address, formed a part of his equipment only second to his capacity to drive.

To this he had no objection. It only seemed odd that while it was his business to be courteous to others it was nobody's business to be courteous to him. Some people were. They used toward him those little formalities of "Please" and "Thank you" which were a matter of course toward one another. They didn't command; they requested. Others, on the contrary, never requested. If their nerves or their digestions were not in good order, they felt at liberty to call him a damn fool, or if they were ladies, to find fault foolishly. Whatever the injustice, it was his part to keep himself schooled to the apologetic atti-

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tude, ready to be held in the wrong when he knew he was in the right. Though he had never heard of the English principle that you may be rude if you choose to your equals, but never rude to those in a position lower than your own, he felt its force instinctively. His humble place in the world's economy entitled him to a courtesy which few people thought it worth their while to show.

Apart from this he had nothing to complain of. He made good money, as the phrase went, his wages augmented by his tips. He took his tips without shame, since he did much to please his clients beyond what he was paid for. His relation with them being personal, he could see well enough that only in tips could they make him any recognition. With the staff in the house he got on very well, especially with the waitresses, all six of them girls working their way through Radcliffe, Wellesley, or Vassar. They chaffed him in an easy-going way, one of them calling him her Hercules, another her Charlemagne because of his height, while to a third he was her Siegfried. When he had no work in the evenings, and their dining-room duties were over, he took them for drives among the mountains. Writing to Honey, he said that what with the air, the food, the fun, and the outdoor life, he was never before in such splendid shape.

Honey was his one anxiety, though an anxiety which troubled him only now and then.

"Go to it, lad," had been his response when Tom had told him of Mr. Ansley's proposition. "With eighty dollars a month for all summer, and yer keep throwed in, yer ought to save two hundred."

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“You’re sure you won’t be lonesome, Honey?”

Honey made a scornful exclamation. “Lord love yer, Kid, if I was ever goin’ to be lonesome I’d ’a begun before now. Lonesome! Me! That’s a good ’un!”

And yet on the Sunday of his departure Tom noticed a forced strain in Honey’s gayety. It was a Sunday because Tom was to drive the car up to New Hampshire in the afternoon to begin his first week on the Monday. Honey was in clamorous spirits, right up to an hour before the boy left.

Then he seemed to go flat. Pump up his humor as he would, it had no zest in it. When it came to the last handshake he grinned feebly, but couldn’t, or didn’t, speak. Tom drove away with a question in his mind as to whether or not, in Honey’s professions of a steeled heart, there was not some bravado.

In driving through Nashua he saw Maisie. It had been agreed that she should meet him by the roadside, at the end of the town toward Lowell, and go on with him till he struck the country again. They not only did this, but got out at a druggist’s to spend a half hour over ice-cream sodas.

Picking up the dropped threads of intercourse was not so easy as they had expected. It was hard for Tom to make himself believe that in this pretty little thing, all in white with pink roses in her hat, he was talking to his future wife. Since the fervor of his first love letter there had been a slight shift in his point of view. Without being able to locate the change, he felt that the new interests—the car, the inn-club, the variety of experience—had to some small

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degree crowded Maisie out. She was not quite so essential as she had seemed on the afternoon when he had learned of her departure. Neither was she quite so pretty. He thought with a pang that Honey's predictions might be coming true. Because they might be coming true, his pity was so great that he told her she was looking lovelier than ever.

"Gee, that's something," Maisie accepted, complacently. "With four brats to look after, and all the cooking and washing, and everything—if my father don't marry again soon I'll pass away." She glanced at his chauffeur's uniform. "You look swell."

He felt swell, and told her so. He told her of his wages, of the economies he hoped to make.

"Gee, and you talk of goin' to college, a fellow that can pull in all that money just by bein' a shofer. Why, if you were to go on bein' a shofer we could get married as soon as I got the family off my hands."

He explained to her that it was not the present, but the future for which he was working. A chauffeur had only a chauffeur's possibilities, whereas a man with an education . . .

"Just my luck to get engaged to a nut," Maisie commented, with forced resignation. "Gee, I got to laff."

Some half dozen times that summer, when errands took him to Boston, they met in the same way. Growing more accustomed to their new relation to each other, he also grew more tender as he realized her limitations and domestic cares. With his first month's wages in his hand, he could bring her little presents on each return from Boston, so helping out her never-

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failing joy in the flash of her big diamond. That at least she had, when every other blessing was put off to a vague future.

In August, the Ansleys came flying back, driven by the war. It had caught them at Munich, where their French chauffeur, Pierre, had been interned as a prisoner. While taking driving lessons Tom had made Pierre's acquaintance, and that he should now be a prisoner in Germany made the war a reality. For the first few weeks it had been like a battle among giants in the clouds; now it came down to earth as a convulsion among men.

The Ansleys had come to the inn-club because their own house was closed. With Guy and Hildred Tom found his relations changed by the fact that he was a chauffeur. Guy talked to him freely enough, as one young fellow to another, but Hildred had plainly received a hint to mark the distance between them. If she passed him in the grounds, or if he opened the car door for her, she gave him a faint, self-conscious smile, but never spoke to him. Mrs. Ansley freely used the car and him, always calling him Whitelaw.

Philip Ansley was much preoccupied by the international situation. A small, dry man of slightly Mongolian features, and a skin which looked like a parchment lampshade tinted with a little rose, he had made a specialty of international law as it affected the great corporations. New York and Washington both had need of him. When he couldn't go there, those who wished his opinion came to him. Not a little of Tom's work lay in driving him to Keene, the station

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for New York, to meet the important men seeking his advice. Thus it happened that Tom brought over from Keene, so late one night that he got no more than a dim glimpse of the visitor, the man who was to leave on him the most disturbing impression of the summer.

Having delivered his charge at the inn-club door, he drove his car to the garage, climbed the stairs to his room, and turned into bed. Before six next morning he was up for a plunge in the lake, this being the only hour he could count on as his own.

It was one of those windless mornings late in summer which bring the first hint of fall. The lake was so still that each throw of his arms was like the smashing of a vast metallic mirror. Only a metallic mirror could have had this shining dullness, faintly iridescent, hardly catching the rays of the newly risen sun. Not leaden enough for night, nor silvery enough for day, it kept the aloofness from man, as well as from Nature's smaller blandishments, of its mighty companion, Monadnock. It was an awesome lake, beautiful, withdrawn, because it gave back the mountain's awesomeness, beauty, and remoteness.

Tom's thrust, as he paddled the water behind him, broke for no more than a few seconds that which at once reformed itself. You would have said that the darting of his body, straight as a fish's, clave the water as a bird cleaves the air. After he had gone there was hardly a ripple to tell that he had passed. Built to be a swimmer, loose limbed, loose muscled, and not too bonily spare, he breathed as a swimmer, deeply, gently, without spluttering or loss of his con-

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trol. In the limpid medium through which another might have sunk like a stone he had that sense of natural support which helps man to his dominion. Now on his right side, now on his left, he could skim like an arrow to its mark for the simple reason that he knew he could.

He turned over on his back and floated. The quiet was that of a world which might never have known the velocity of wind, the ferocity of war. Above him the inviolate sky; around him the mountains nearly as inviolate! And everywhere the living stillness, vibrating, dramatic, with which Nature alone can quicken a dead calm!

Turning over again, he was abandoning the crawl for the forearm stroke, to make his way back to the bathing cabins, when over the water came a long "Ahoy!" Nearer the shore, and a little abeam, there was another man swimming toward him. Tom gave back an "Ahoy!" and made in the direction of the stranger. It was perhaps another chauffeur. Even if it were a resident, or some resident's guest, the informality of sport would put them on a level.

The newcomer had the sun behind him; Tom had it on his face. His features were, therefore, the first to become visible. A strong voice called out, in a tone of astonishment:

"Why, Tad! What are *you* doing up here in New Hampshire?"

Tom laughed. "Tad—nothing! I'm Tom!"

The other came nearer. "Tom, are you? Excuse me! Took you for my son."

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"Sorry I'm not," Tom laughed again. "Somebody else's."

Coming abreast, they headed toward shore. Each face was turned toward the other. Adopting his companion's stroke, Tom adjusted himself to his pace. Though conversation was not easy, the one found it possible to ask questions, the other to answer them.

"Look like my son. What's your name?"

"Whitelaw."

A light came into the eyes, and went out again.

"Where do you live?"

"Boston."

"Lived there all your life?"

"Only for the last three years or so."

"Where'd you live before that?"

"New York some of the time."

"Where were you born?"

"The Bronx."

"What was your father's name?"

"Theodore Whitelaw."

There was again that spark in the eyes, flashing and then dying out. "How did he get that name?"

"Don't know. Just a name. Suppose his mother gave it to him."

"Lots of Theodore Whitelaws. Have come across two or three. Like the Colin Campbells and Howard Smiths you run into everywhere. What did your father do?"

"Never heard. Died when I was a kid." Tom felt entitled to ask a question on his own side. "What do you want to know for?"

The other seemed on his guard. "Oh, nothing!"

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Was just—was just struck by the resemblance to—to my boy.”

The swerve which took them away from each other was as slight as that which a ship gets from her rudder. Tom continued to play round in the water till he saw the older man reach the bathing cabins, dress, and go away.

That afternoon he was told to drive back to Keene both Mr. Ansley and the guest whom he, Tom, had brought over on the previous evening. As the latter came out to enter the car it was easy to recognize the swimmer of the morning.

Tom held the door open, his hand to his cap. The gentleman gave him a swift, keen look.

“Oh, so this is what you do!”

“Yes, sir; this is what I do. Mr. Ansley got me the job.”

“Young fellow whom Guy has befriended,” Mr. Ansley explained, as he took his place beside his friend.

But in the Pullman, when Tom had carried in the gentleman's valise, there was another minute in which they were alone. The car was nearly empty; there were still some five minutes before the departure of the train. While the colored porter took the suitcase the traveler turned to Tom. He was a tall man, straight and flexible like Tom himself, but a little heavier.

“How old are you?”

“Seventeen, sir.”

A shadow flew across the face. “Tad is seventeen, too. That settles any—” Without stating what was

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settled by this coincidence of ages, he went on with his quick, peremptory questions. "What do you do when you leave here?"

"I go back for my last year in the Latin School in Boston."

"And then?"

"I go to Harvard."

"Putting yourself through?"

"Only partly, sir."

"Friends?"

"Yes, sir."

The questions ceased. The face, which even a boy like Tom could see to be that of a strong man who must have suffered terribly, grew pensive. When the eyes were bent toward the floor Tom took note of a pair of bushy, outstanding, horizontal eyebrows, oddly like his own.

The reverie ended abruptly. Some thought seemed to be dismissed. It seemed to be dismissed with both decision and relief. But the man held out his hand.

"Good-by."

"Good-by, sir."

It was not the questions, nor the interest, it was the last little act of farewell that gave Tom a glowing feeling in the heart as he went back to his car and Mr. Ansley.

XXIX

IT was late that evening before Tom found an opportunity to ask Miss Padley, who kept what the inn-club knew as the office, the name of the guest who had questioned him so closely. Miss Padley was a red-haired, freckled girl, putting herself through Radcliffe. Unused to clerical work, she was tired. When Tom put his query she gazed up at him vacantly, before she could collect her wits.

“The name of the gentleman who left this afternoon?” She called to Ella, one of the waitresses, in her second year at Wellesley. “What was it, Ella? I forget.”

As the house was closing for the night some informality was possible. Ella sauntered up.

“What was what?”

Tom’s question was repeated.

“Oh, that was the great Henry T. Whitelaw. Big banker. Partner in Meek and Brokenshire’s. They say that he and a few other bankers could stop the war if they liked, by holding back the cash. Don’t believe it. War’s too big. And, say! He was the father of that Whitelaw baby there used to be all the talk about.”

Miss Padley looked up, her cheek resting on her hand. “You don’t say! Gee, I wish I’d known that. I’d ’a looked at him a little closer.” She turned her

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tired greenish eyes toward Tom. "Your name is Whitelaw, too, isn't it?"

He grinned nervously. "My name is Whitelaw, too, only, like the lady's maid whose name was Shakespeare but was no relation to the play-actor of that name, I don't belong to the banking branch of the family."

Ella exclaimed, as one who makes a discovery. "But, Siegfried, you look as if you did. Doesn't he, Blanche? Look at his eyebrows. They're just like the banker man's."

"Oh, I've looked at them often enough," Miss Padley returned, wearily. "Got his mustaches stuck on in the wrong place. I'm off."

Yawning, she shut her ledger, closed an open drawer, and rose. But Ella, a dark little thing, kept her snappy black eyes on Tom.

"You do look like him, Siegfried. I'd put in a claim if I were you. I'm single, you know, and I've always admired you. Think of the romance it would make if the Whitelaw baby took home as his bride a poor but honest working girl!"

Dodging Ella's chaff, Tom escaped to the garage. It was queer how the Whitelaw baby haunted him. Honey!—Ella!—and the Whitelaw baby's own father!

But the haunting stopped. Neither Ella nor Miss Padley took it as more than a passing pleasantry, forgotten with the morning. The tall man who had asked him questions never came back again. The rest of the summer went by with but one little incident to remain in his memory.

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It was a very little incident. Walking one day in the road that ran round the lake he came face to face with Hildred Ansley. She had grown since the previous winter, a little in height, and more in an indefinable development. She was fifteen now; but, always older than her age, she was more like seventeen or eighteen. Her formal manner, her decided mind, her "grown-up" choice of words, made her already something of that finished entity for which we have only the word lady. Ella had said of her that at twenty she would look like forty, and at forty continue to look like twenty. Tom thought that this might be true—an early fullness of womanhood, but a long one.

She had been playing tennis, and swung her racket as she came along. He was sorry for this direct encounter, since she might find it awkward; but when she waved her racket to him, it was clear that she did not. She felt perhaps the more independent, released from her mother's supervision and the inn. Her smile, something in her way of pausing in the road, an ease of manner beyond analysis, put them both on the plane on which their acquaintance had begun. The slanting yellowish-brown eyes together with the faint glimmer of a smile heightened that air of mystery which had always made her different from other girls.

"How have you been getting along?"

He said he had been doing very well.

"How have you liked the job?"

"Fine! Everybody's been nice to me—"

"Everybody likes you. All the same, I hope, if they ask you to come back next year, that—you won't."

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“Why not?”

“Oh, just—because!”

Slipping away, she left him with the summer's second memory. She hoped he wouldn't take the place again—*because!* Because—what? Could she have meant what he thought she must have meant? Was it possible that she didn't like to see him in a situation something like a servant's? Though he never again, during all the rest of the summer, had so much speech with her alone, it gave him a hint to turn over in his mind.

Driving the car back to Boston, after the inn-club had closed, he saw Maisie for the last time that year. Uncertain of his hours, he had been unable to arrange to have her meet him, and so looked her up in her home. A small wooden house, once stained a dark red, weather-worn now to a reddish-dun, it stood on the outskirts of the town. In a weedy back-yard, redeemed from ugliness by the flaming of a maple tree, Maisie was pinning newly washed clothes to a clothes-line stretched between the back door and a post. Two children, a boy of six and a girl of eight, were tumbling about with a pup. At sound of the stopping of the car in the roadway in front of the house Maisie turned, a clothes-pin held lengthwise in her mouth. Even with her sleeves rolled up and her hair in wisps, she couldn't be anything but pretty.

She came and sat beside him in the car, the children and the pup staring up at them in wonder.

“Gee, I wish he'd get married; but I daresay he won't for ever so long. Married to the bottle, that's what he is. It was six years after my mother died

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before he took on the last one. That's what makes me so much older than the four kids. All the same I'd beat it if you'd take a shofer's job and settle down. I'm not bound to stay here and make myself a slave."

It was the burden of all Maisie's reasoning, and he had to admit its justice. He was asking her to wait a long four years before he could give her a home. It would have been more preposterous than it was if among poor people, among poor young people especially, a long courtship, with marriage as a vague fulfillment, was not general. Any such man as she was likely to get would have to toil and save, and save and toil, before he could pay for the few sticks of furniture they would need to set up housekeeping. Never having thought of anything else, she was the more patient now; but patient with a strain of rebellion against Tom's whim for education.

She cried when he left her; he almost cried himself, from a sense of his impotence to take her at once from a life of drudgery. The degree to which he loved her seemed to be secondary now to her helpless need of him. True, he could get a job as chauffeur and make a hundred dollars a month to begin with. To Maisie that would be riches; but a hundred and fifty a month would then become his lifelong limit and ambition. Even to save Maisie now he couldn't bring himself to sacrifice not merely his future but her own. Once he was "through college," it seemed to him that the treasures of the world would lie open.

Arrived in Grove Street, he found one new condition which made his return easier. Honey, who, for the sake of economy, had occupied a hall-bedroom

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through the summer, had reserved another, on the floor above, for Tom. The relief from the sharing of one big room amounted to a sense of luxury.

On the other hand, Honey, for the first time since Tom had known him, was moody and tired. He was not ill; he was only less cast-iron than he used to be. He found it harder to go to work in the morning; he was more spent when he came back at night, as if some inner impulse of virility was wearing itself out. The war worried him. The fact that old England had met a foe whom she couldn't walk over at once disturbed his ideas as to the way in which the foundations of the world had been laid.

"Anything can happen now, kid," he declared, in discussing the English retreat from Mons. "Haven't felt so bad since the bloody cop give me the whack with his club what put out me eye. If Englishmen has to turn tail before Germans, well, what next?"

But to Tom's suggestions that he should go to Canada and enlist in the British army Honey was as stone. "You're too young. Y'ain't got yer growth. I don't care what no one says. War is for men. Yer first business, and yer last business, and yer only business, is yer eddication."

It must be admitted that Tom agreed with him. He had no longing to go to war. Europe was far away while life was near. Education, Maisie, the future, had the first claim on him. It began to occur to him that even Honey had a claim on him, now that he was not so vigorous as he used to be.

There were other interests to make war remote. On returning to town, after a summer amid the spa-

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ciousness, beauty, and comfort which the few could give themselves, he was oppressed by the privations of the many. Never before had he thought of them. He had taken Grove Street for granted. He had taken it for granted that life was hard and crowded and bitter and cold and ugly, and couldn't be anything else. Now he had seen for himself that it could be easy and beautiful and healthy. True, he had always known that there were rich people as well as poor people; but never before had he been close enough to the rich to see their luxuries in detail. The contrasts in the human scheme of things having thus come home to him he was moved to a distressed wondering.

What brought these differences about? If all the rich were industrious and good, while all the poor were idle and extravagant, he could have understood it better. But it wasn't so. The rich were often idle and extravagant, and didn't suffer. The poor were nearly always industrious—they couldn't be anything else—and were as good as they had leisure to be, but suffered from something all the time. How could this injustice be endured? What was to be done about it? Wasn't it everybody's duty to try to right such a wrong?

Because he had only now become aware of it he supposed that nobody but the Slav and Jewish agitators had been aware of it before. Louisburg Square, and all that element in the world which Louisburg Square represented, could never have thought of it. If it had, it couldn't have slept at night in its bed. That it should lie snug and soft and warm while all the rest of the world—at least a good three-fourths—

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lay cold and hard and hungry, must be out of the question. If the rich people only knew! It was strange that someone hadn't told them. What were the newspapers and the governments and the churches doing that they weren't ringing with protests against this fundamental evil?

More than ever Honey's rebellion against the lot of property seemed to him based on some principle he couldn't trace. Honey was doubtless all wrong; and yet the other thing was just as wrong as Honey. He started him talking on the subject as they strolled to their dinner that evening.

"Seems as if this 'ere old human race didn't have no spunk. Yer can put anything over on them, and they'll 'ardly lift a kick. It's like as if they was hypnertized. Them as has got everything is hypnertized into thinkin' they've a right to it; and them as have got nothink 'll let theirselves believe as nothink is all that belongs to 'em. Comes o' most o' the world bein' orthodoxs. Lord love yer, I'd rather think for meself if it landed me ten months out'n every twelve in jail, than have two thousand a year and yet be an old tabby-orthodock what never had a mind."

They were seated at the table in Mrs. Turtle's basement dining-room, when, looking up and down the double row of guests, Honey whispered, "Tabby-orthodocks—all of 'em."

At his sixteen or eighteen fellow-mealers Tom looked with a new vision. With the aid of Honey's epithet he could class them. Mostly men, they sat bowed, silent, futile, gulping down their coarse food with no pretense at softening the animal processes of

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eating. These, too, he had hitherto taken for granted. In all the months they had "mealed" at Mrs. Turtle's—in the years they had "mealed" at similar establishments in Grove Street—he had looked on them, and on others of their kind, as the norm of humanity. Now he saw something wrong in them, without knowing what it was.

"What's the matter with them?" he asked of Honey, as they went back across Grove Street to Mrs. Danker's.

Honey's reply was standardized. "Bein' orthodox. Not thinkin' for theirselves. Not usin' the mind as Gord give 'em. Believin' what other blokes told 'em, and stoppin' at that. I say, Kiddy! Don't yer never go for to forget that yer'll get farther in the world by bein' wrong the way yer thinks yerself than by bein' right the way some other feller tells yer."

Having reached their own house they stood, each with a foot on the doorstep, while Tom smoked a cigarette and Honey enlarged on his philosophy.

"I don't believe as Gord put us into this world to be right not 'arf so much as what He done it so as we'd find out for ourselves what's right and what's wrong. One right thing as yer've found out for yerself 'll make yer more of a man than fifty as yer've took on trust. Look at 'em in there!" He nodded backward toward Mrs. Turtle's. "They've all took everythink on trust, and see what it's made of 'em. Whoever says, 'I'm an orthodox, and I'm goin' to live and die an orthodox,' is like the guy in the Bible as was bound, 'and and foot with grave-clothes. My

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genius was always for thinkin' things out for meself; and look at me to-day!"

It was another discovery to Tom that Honey felt proud and happy in his accomplishment. Honey to Tom was a machine for doing heavy work. He was a drudge, and a dray-horse. He was shut out from the higher, the more spiritual activities. But here was Honey himself content, and in a measure exultant.

"Been wrong in a lot o' things I have; but I've found it out for meself. I ain't sorry for what I've did. It's learned me. There ain't a old jug I've been in, in England or the State o' New York, that didn't learn me somethink. I see now that I was wrong. But I see, too, that them as tried and sentenced me wasn't right. When they repents of the sins what their lors and gover'ments and churches has committed against this old world, I'll repent o' the sins I've committed against them."

This ability to stand alone, mentally at least, against all religion and society, was, as Tom saw it, the secret of Honey's independence. He might have been a rogue, a burglar, a convict; and yet he was a man, as the orthodoxes at Mrs. Turtle's were not, and never had been, men. Having allowed themselves to be hammered into subjection by what Honey called lors, gover'ments, and churches, in subjection they had been trapped, and never could get out again. There was something about Honey that was strong and free.

XXX

TO make himself strong and free was Tom White-law's ruling motive through the winter which preceded his going to Harvard. He must be a man, not merely in physical vigor, but in mental independence. Convinced that he was in what he called a rotten world, a world of rotten customs built on a rotten foundation, he saw it as a task to learn to pick his way amid the rottenness. To rebel, but keep his rebellion as steam with which to drive his engine, not as something to let off in futile raging against established convictions, was a hint of Honey's by which he profited.

"It don't do yer no good to kick so as they can ketch and jump on you. I've tried that. And it ain't no good to jaw. Tried that too. If the uninherited was anythink but a bunch o' simps you might be able to rouse 'em. But they ain't. All yer can do is to shut yer mouth and live. Yer'll live harder and surer with yer mouth shut. Yer'll live truer too, just as yer'll shoot straighter when yer ain't talkin' and fidgin' about. Don't believe what no judge or gov'nor or bishop says to yer just because he says it; but don't let 'em know as yer don't believe it, because they'll hoodoo you with their whim-whams. Awful glad they'll be, both Church and State, to ruin the man what don't believe the way they tell him to."

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On the eve of manhood Tom thought more highly of Honey than he had when a few years younger. Having judged him drugged by work, he found that he had ideas of his own, however mistaken they might be. However mistaken they might be, they had at least produced one guiding principle: to keep your mouth shut and live! Taking his notes about life, as he did through the following winter, he made them according to this counsel.

The outstanding feature of the season was the development of something like a real friendship with Guy Ansley. Hitherto the two young men had backed and filled; but in proportion as Tom grew more sure of himself the weaker fellow clung to him. He clung in his own way; but he clung. He was the patron. Tom was the fine young chap he had taken a fancy to and was helping along.

"I'm awful democratic that way. Whole lot of fellows 'll think they've just got to go with their own gang. Doolittle and Pray's is full of that sort of bunk. The Doolittle and Pray spirit they call it. I call it fluff. If I like a fellow I stick by him, no matter what he is. I'd just as soon go round with you as with the stylistest fellow on the Back Bay. Social position don't mean anything to me. Of course I know it's very nice to have it; but if a fellow hasn't got it, why, I don't care, not so long as he's a sport."

"Keep your mouth shut and live," Tom reminded himself. He liked Guy Ansley well enough. He was at least a fellow of his own age, with whom he could be franker than had been possible with Maisie, and who would understand him in ways in which Honey

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never could. With the difference made by ten years in his point of view, he discussed with Guy the same sort of subjects, sex, religion, profession, vices, politics, that he had talked over with Bertie Tollivant. Merely to hear their own voices on these themes eased the adolescent turmoil in their brains.

Hildred Ansley, having entered Miss Winslow's school as a boarder, was immured as in a convent. Her absence made it the easier for Tom to run in and out of the Ansley house on the missions, secret and important, which boys create among themselves. Guy had a set of maps by which you could follow the ebb and flow on the battlefield. Guy had a wireless installation with which you could listen in on messages not meant for you. Guy had skis, and bought another pair for Tom so that they could tramp together on the Fenway. Guy had a runabout which Tom taught him to drive. Guy had tickets for any play or concert he chose to attend, and invited Tom to go along with him.

Doubtful at first, Mrs. Ansley came round to view the acquaintance almost without misgiving.

"I think you're a steady boy, aren't you?" she asked of Tom one day, when finding him alone.

Tom smiled. "I don't get much chance, ma'am, to be anything else."

Lacking a sense of humor, Mrs. Ansley was literal.

"I don't like you to say that. It sounds as if when you do get the chance—But perhaps you'll know better by that time. It's something I hope Guy will help you to see in return for all the—well, the physical protection you give him."

"Oh, but, ma'am, I—"

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"That'll do. I know my boy is brave. But I know too that he's not very strong, and to have a great fellow like you, used to roughing it—It reminds me of the big Cossack who always goes round with the little Tsarevitch. Not that Guy is as young as that, but he's been tenderly brought up."

"Oh, mother, give us a rest!" Guy had rushed into his flowered room from whatever errand had taken him away. "If I *have* been tenderly brought up, I'm as tough to-day as any mucker down where Tom lives."

"The dear boy!"

She smiled at Tom, as at one who like herself understood this extravagance, moving away with the stately lilt that made her skirts flounce up and down.

"It's Hildred that's sicking the old lady on to her little song and dance in your favor," Guy declared, when they had the room to themselves again. "Hildred likes you. Always has. She's democratic, too, just like me. Once let a fellow be a sport and Hildred wouldn't care what he was socially."

"Keep your mouth shut and live," became Tom's daily self-adjuration. That Guy sincerely liked him he was sure, and this in itself meant much to him. The patronage could be smiled away. If he and his mother failed in tact they gave him much in compensation. In their house he was getting accustomed to certain small usages which at first had overawed him. Space didn't dwarf him any more, nor beauty strike him spellbound. He was so courteous to Pilcher that Pilcher, returning deference for deference, had once or twice called him "sir." The plays to which Guy

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took him were a long step in his education; the music they heard together released a whole new range in his emotions.

He discovered that Guy was what is commonly called musical. He played the piano not badly; he knew something of the classics, of the great romantics, of the moderns. Back of the library was a music room, and when other occupations palled, there Guy would play and explain, while Tom sat listening and enjoying. Guy liked explaining; it showed his superiority. Tom liked to learn. To know the difference between Mozart and Beethoven was a stage in progress. To have the cabalistic names of Wagner and Debussy, which he had often seen in newspapers, spring to significance was an initiation into mysteries.

So with work, with sports, with amusements, the winter sped by, bringing a sense of an expanding life. He had one main care: Maisie was more unhappy. Her appeals to him to throw up college, to become a chauffeur and marry her, increased in urgency.

He had come to the point of seeing that his engagement to Maisie was a bit of folly. If Honey were to learn of it, or the Ansleys . . . but he hoped to keep it secret till he won a position in which he could be free of censure. Once with an income to support a wife, his mistakes and sufferings would be his own business. In proportion as life opened up it was easy for him to face trouble cheerfully.

May had come round, and by keeping his birthday on the fifth of March, he was now more than eighteen. On a Saturday morning when there was no school to attend he and Guy had lingered on the roof of the

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Ansley house after their task with the wireless apparatus was over. Looking across the river toward Cambridge, where one big tower marked the site of Harvard, they were speculating on the new step in manhood they would take in the following October.

Pilcher's old head appeared through the skylight to inform Mr. Guy that lunch was waiting. Madam wished him to come down.

"Where is she?"

"She's in the dining room, Mr. Guy."

"Get along, Tom. I'll be ready with the runabout at two. You won't be late, will you?"

Tom said he would not be late, following Pilcher through the skylight and down the several flights of stairs. He was eager to slip out the front door without encountering Mrs. Ansley. Mrs. Ansley was eager not to encounter him. With lunch on the table, it would be awkward not to ask him to sit down; and to ask him to sit down would be out of the question. It would be just like Guy . . .

And then Guy did what was just like him. "Mother," he called out, puffing down the last of the staircases, "why can't Tom have lunch with us? He's got to be back here at two anyway. He's coming out with me in the runabout."

Tom was doing his best to turn the knob of the front door. "Couldn't, Guy," he whispered back, shaking his head violently. "Got to beat it."

In reality he was running away. To sit at the table with Mrs. Ansley, and be served by Pilcher, required a knowledge of etiquette he did not possess.

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“Mother, grab him,” Guy insisted. “He might as well stay, mightn’t he?”

Reluctantly Mrs. Ansley appeared in the doorway. In so far as she could ever be vexed with Guy, she was vexed. “If Whitelaw’s got to go, dear—”

“He hasn’t got to go, have you, Tom? He don’t have a home to toe the line at. He just picks up his grub wherever he can get it.”

To such an appeal it was impossible to be wholly deaf. “Oh, then, if Whitelaw chooses to stay with us—”

“Oh, I couldn’t, ma’am,” Tom cried, hurriedly. “I’ve got to—”

But Guy, who had now reached the floor of the hall, caught him by the arm. “Oh, come along in. It can’t hurt us. The old lady’s just as democratic as Hildred and me.”

Mrs. Ansley was overborne; she couldn’t help herself. Tom also was overborne, finding it easier to yield than to rebel. There being but three places laid at the table, one of which was reserved for Mr. Ansley in case he came home for luncheon, Pilcher set a fourth.

“Will you sit there, Whitelaw?”

“Oh, mother, call him Tom. He isn’t a chauffeur, not when he’s in town here.”

If anyone but Guy had put her in this situation Mrs. Ansley would have deemed it due to herself to sail from the room. As it was, she endeavored to humor the boy, to keep Tom in his place, and to rescue the dignity which had never yet sat down at table with a servant.

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"I'm sure there's no harm in being a chauffeur. I'm the last person in the world to say so, dependent on chauffeurs as I am. Besides, we knew, of course, that some of the young people helping us at the inn-club were studying in colleges, and that they didn't mean to stay in those positions permanently." She grew arch. "But I'm not democratic, Mr. Whitelaw. Guy knows I'm not. It's his way of teasing me. He's perfectly aware that I consider democracy a failure. There never was a greater fallacy than that all men were born free and equal. As to freedom I'm indifferent; but I've never pretended that any Tom, Dick, or Harry was my equal, and I never shall."

"You don't mean this Tom, do you, old lady?"

"Now, Guy! Isn't he a tease, Mr. Whitelaw? But I do believe in equality of opportunity. That seems to me one of the glories of our country. So many of our great men have come from the very humblest origin. And if we can do anything to help them along—with Guy that's an obsession. If it's a fault I say it's a good fault. Better to err on that side, I always think, than to see some one achieve the big thing, and know that you had no share in it when you might have had. That's shepherd's pie, Mr. Whitelaw. We have very simple lunches because Mr. Ansley doesn't always come home, and in any case his meal is his dinner."

She rambled on because Guy was too busy with his food to help her, and Tom too terrified. He was sorry not merely for himself, but for her. Compelled to admit him to breaking bread with her, she must feel as if he had been forced on her in her dressing

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room. As a matter of fact, he admired the way in which she was carrying it off. Long ago, having divined her as taking her inherited position in Boston as a kind of sanctifying aura, shrinking from unauthorized approach like a sensitive plant from a touch, she reminded him of an anecdote he had somewhere read of Queen Victoria. The Queen was holding a council. Present at it among others was a statesman sitting for the first time as a member of the cabinet. Obligated at a given moment to carry a paper from one side of the table to the other, this gentleman passed back of the Queen's chair, accidentally grazing it with his hand. The Queen shuddered and shrank away. The touching merely of the chair was a violation of majesty. "He won't do," she whispered to the prime minister. He didn't do. He passed not only into political but into social oblivion. Tom recalled the incident as he tried to choke down his shepherd's pie. He was the unhappy statesman. He wouldn't do. Amiable as Mrs. Ansley tried to make herself, he knew how she was suffering. He was suffering himself.

And in on his suffering, to make it worse, bustled Mr. Ansley. Throwing his hat and gloves on a settle in the hall, he shot into the dining room at once. He was a man who shot, sharply, directly, rather than one who walked. Tom stood up.

"Sorry I'm so late, Sunshine—" His eye fell on Tom. "Oh, how-d'ye-do? Seen you before, haven't I? Oh! Oh!" The exclamations were of surprise and a little pain. "Why, you're the young fellow who ran the station car for us."

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Mrs. Ansley intervened as one who pacifies. "He's going out with Guy at two o'clock, to help him run the runabout."

"*Help* me run it! Why, mother, you talk as if—"

"And Guy couldn't let him go off without anything to eat."

"Quite so! quite so!" Mr. Ansley agreed. "Glad to see you. Sit down." He helped himself to the shepherd's pie which Pilcher passed again. "Let me see! What was it your name was?"

Tom sat down again. "Whitelaw, sir."

"Oh, yes; so it was. You're the same Whitelaw who's been running about this winter and spring with Guy. Quite so! quite so! Oh, and by the way, Sunshine, speaking of Whitelaw, Henry looked in on me this morning. Ran over from New York about some business cropped up since the sinking of the *Lusitania*."

"How is he?"

"Seems rather worried. Lost several intimate friends on the ship, besides which the old question seems to be popping up again."

Mrs. Ansley sighed. "Oh, dear! I hope they'll not be dragged through all that with another of their foolish clues. I thought it was over."

"It's over for Eleonora. But you know how Henry feels about it. Got it on the brain. Pity, I call it, after—how many years is it?"

Mrs. Ansley computed. "It was while we were on our honeymoon. Don't you remember? We read it in the paper at Montreal, after we'd come from

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Niagara Falls. That was the fifteenth of May, and Harry had been stolen on the tenth."

Tom felt a queer sick sinking of the heart. The tenth of May was the last of the three dates his mother had fixed as his birthday. She had told him, too, that the day when he was born was one on which the nursemaids were in the Park, and the lilacs had been in bloom. Why this specification? If, as she had informed him at other times, he was born in the Bronx, where Gracie also had been born, why the reference to the Park and nursemaids, five miles away? He listened avidly.

"How old would that make him if he were living now?"

Again Mrs. Ansley reckoned. "Something over nineteen. I've forgotten just how many months he was when he disappeared."

Tom was reassured. He was only eighteen; he was positive of that. He couldn't have been nineteen without ever suspecting it. Mr. Ansley continued.

"Seems to me a great mistake to bring him back now, even if they found him. A lumbering fellow of nineteen, practically a man, with probably the lowest associations."

"That's what Onora feels. She's told me so. She couldn't go through it. Even if he isn't dead in fact he's dead to them."

"Henry feels that, of course. He doesn't deny it. He doesn't want him back—not now. At the same time when any new will o' the wisp starts up he can't help feeling—"

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Tom was back in his little hall bedroom, after the run in the car with Guy, before he had time to think these scraps of conversation over. The details for which he had to render an account were, first, his sickening sense of dread on learning that the Whitelaw baby had been stolen on the tenth of May, and, then, his relief that the child, if now alive, would be nineteen years of age. These sensations or emotions, whatever they might be called, had been independent of his will. What did they portend? Why was he frightened in the one case, and in the other comforted?

He didn't know. That he didn't know was the only decision he could reach. Were the impossible ever to come true, were the parents of the Whitelaw baby ever, no matter how unwillingly, to claim him as their son, the advantages to him would be obvious. Why then did he hate the idea? What was it in him that cried out, and pleaded not to be forsaken?

He didn't know.

XXXI

LUCKILY the questions raised that day died out like a false alarm. With no further mention of the Whitelaw baby, he graduated from the Latin School, passed his exams at Harvard, and spent the summer as second in command of a boys' camp in a part of New Hampshire remote from the inn-club and the Ansleys. October found him a freshman. The new life was beginning.

He had slept his first night in his bedroom in Gore Hall, where his quarters had been appointed. He had met the three fellow-freshmen with whom he was to share a sitting room. The sitting room was on the ground floor in a corner, looking out on the Embankment and the Charles. Never having had, since he left the Quidmores, a place in which to work better than the narrow squalid room at the end of a narrow squalid hall, his joy in this new decency of living was naïve to the point of childishness. He spent in that retreat, during the first twenty-four hours, every minute not occupied with duties. Because he was glad of the task, his colleagues had left to him as much of the job of arranging the furniture as he would assume.

On the second day of his residence he was on his knees, behind his desk, pulling at a rug that had been wrinkled up. His zeal could bear nothing not neat, straight, adjusted. The desk was heavy, the rug

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stubborn. When a rap sounded on the door he called out, "Come in!" looking up above the edge of the desk only when the door had been opened and closed.

A lady, dignified, a little portly, was stepping into the room, with the brisk air of one who had a right there. As she had been motoring, she was wreathed in a dark green veil, which partially hid her features. Peeling off a gauntlet, she glanced round the room, after a first glance at Tom.

"I'm sorry to be late, Tad. That stupid Patterson lost his way. He's a very good driver, but he's no sense of direction. Why, where's the picture? You said you had had it hung."

Her tone was crisp and staccato. In her breath there was the syncopated halt which he afterward came to associate with the actress, Mrs. Fiske. She might be nervous; or she might suffer from the heart.

For the first few seconds he was too agitated to know exactly what to do. He had been looked at and called Tad again, this time probably by Tad's mother. He rose to his height of six feet two. The lady started back.

"Why, what have you been doing to yourself? What are you standing on? What makes you so tall?"

"I'm afraid there's some mistake, ma'am."

She broke in with a kind of petulance. "Oh, Tad, no nonsense! I'm tired. I'm not in the mood for it."

Both gauntlets peeled off, she flung them on the desk. With a motion as rapid as her speech she stepped toward a window and looked out over the Embankment.

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"It's going to be noisy and dusty for you here. The stream of cars is incessant."

Being now beyond the desk, she caught the fullness of his stature. Her left hand went up with a startled movement. She gave a little gasp.

"Oh! You frightened me. You're not standing on anything."

"No, ma'am, I . . ."

"I asked for Mr. Whitelaw's room. They told me to come to number twenty-eight."

Making her way out, she kept looking back at him in terror. When he hurried to open the door for her, she waved him away. Everything she did and said was rapid, staccato, and peremptory.

"You've forgotten your gloves, ma'am."

He reached them with a stretch of his arm. Taking them from him, she still kept her eyes on his face.

"No! You don't look like him. I thought you did. I was wrong. It's only the—the eyes—and the eyebrows."

She was gone. He closed the door upon her. Dropping into an armchair by the window, he stared out on a wide low landscape, with a double procession of motor cars in the foreground, and a river in the middle distance.

So this was the woman who had lived through the agony of a stolen child! He tried to recall what Honey had told him of the tragedy. He remembered the house which five years earlier Honey had taken him to see; he remembered the dell with the benches and the lilacs. This woman's child had been wheeled out there one morning—and had vanished. She had

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had to bear being told of the fact. She had gone through the minutes when the mind couldn't credit it. She had known fear, frenzy, hope, suspense, disappointment, discouragement, despair, and lassitude. In self-defense, in sheer inability of the human spirit to endure more than it has endured, she had thrown round her a hard little shell of refusal to hear of it again. She resented the reminder. She was pricked to a frantic excitement by a mere chance resemblance to the image of what the lost little boy might have become.

A chance resemblance! He underscored the words. It was all there was. He himself was the son of Theodore and Lucy Whitelaw. At least he thought her name was Lucy. Not till he had been required to give the names of his parents for some school record did it occur to him that he didn't positively know. She had always been "Mudda." He hadn't needed another name. After she had gone there had been no one to supply him with the facts he had not learned before. Even the Theodore would have escaped him had it not been for that last poignant scene, when she stood before the officer and gave a name—Mrs. Theodore Whitelaw! Why not? There were more Whitelaws than one. There was no monopoly of the name in the family that had lost the child.

He didn't often consciously think of her nowadays. The memory was not merely too painful; it was too destructive of the things he was trying to cherish. He had impulses rather than ideals, in that impulses form themselves more spontaneously; and all his im-

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pulses were toward rectitude. It was not a chosen standard; neither was it imposed upon him from without, unless it was in some vague general direction of the spirit received while at the Tollivants. He didn't really think of it. He took it as a matter of course. He couldn't be anything but what he was, and there was an end of it. But all his attempts to get a working concept of himself led him back to this beginning, where the fountain of life was befouled.

So he rarely went back that far. He would go back to the Quidmores, to the Tollivants, to Mrs. Crewdson; but he stopped there. There he hung up a great curtain, soft and dim and pitiful, the veil of an immense tenderness. Rarely, very rarely, did he go behind it. He would not have done it on this afternoon had not the woman who had just gone out—dressed, as anyone could see, with the expensive easy-going roughness which only rich women can afford—neurotic, imperious, unhappy—had not this woman sent him there. She was a great lady whose tragic story haunted him; but she turned his mind backward, as it hardly ever turned, to the foolish and misguided soul who had loved him. No one since that time, no one whatever in the life he could remember, had loved him at all, unless it were Honey, and Honey denied that he did. How could he forsake . . . ? And then it came to him what it was that pleaded within him not to be forsaken.

The lecture was over. It was one of the first Tom had attended. The men, some hundred odd in number, were shuffling their papers, preparatory to getting up.

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Seated in an amphitheater, they filled the first seven or eight semicircles outward from the stage. The arrangement being alphabetical, Tom, as a *W*, was in the most distant row.

The lecturer, who was also putting his papers together as they lay on a table beside him, looked up casually to call out,

“If Mr. Whitelaw is here I should like to speak to him.”

Tom shot from his seat and stood up. The man on his left did the same. Occupied with taking notes on the little table attached to the right arm—the only arm—of his chair, Tom had not turned to the left at all. He was surprised now at the ripple of laughter that ran among the men beginning to get up from their seats or to file out into the corridor. The professor smiled too.

“You’re brothers?”

Tom looked at his neighbor; his neighbor looked at Tom. Except for the difference in height the resemblance was startling or amusing, as you chose to take it. To the men going by it was amusing.

It was the neighbor, however, who called out, in a shocked voice: “Oh, no, no! No connection.”

“Then it’s to Mr. Theodore Whitelaw that I wish to speak.”

Mr. Theodore Whitelaw made his way toward the platform, taking no further notice of Tom.

For this lack of the friendly freemasonry general among young men, general among freshmen especially, Tom thought he saw a reason. The outward appearance which enabled him to “place” Tad would

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enable Tad to "place" him. On the one there was the stamp of wealth; on the other there must be that of poverty. He might have met Tad Whitelaw anywhere in the world, and he would have known him at a glance as a fellow nursed on money since he first lay in a cradle. It wasn't merely a matter of dress, though dress counted for something. It was a matter of the personality. It was in the eyes, in the skin, in the look, in the carriage, in the voice. It was not in refinement, or cultivation, or cleverness, or use of opportunity; it was in something subtler than these, a cast of mind, a habit of thought, an acceptance, a self-confidence, which seeped through every outlet of expression. Tad Whitelaw embodied wealth, position, the easy use of whatever was best in whatever was material. You couldn't help seeing it.

On the other hand, he, Tom Whitelaw, probably bore the other kind of stamp. He had not thought of that before. In as far as he had thought of it, it was to suppose that the stamp could be rubbed off, or covered up. Clothes would do something toward that, and in clothes he had been extravagant. He had come to Harvard with two new suits, made to his order by the Jew tailor next door to Mrs. Danker's. But in contrast with the young New Yorker his extravagance had been futile. He found for himself the most opprobrious word in all the American language—cheap.

Very well! He probably couldn't help looking cheap. But if cheap he would be big. He wouldn't resent. He would keep his mouth shut and live. Things would right themselves by and by.

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They righted themselves soon. The three men with whom he shared the sitting room, having passed him as "a good scout," admitted him to full and easy comradeship. In the common-room, in the classroom, he held his own, and made a few friends. Guy Ansley, urged in part by a real liking, and in part by the glory of having this big handsome fellow in tow, was generous of recognition. He was standing one day with a group of his peers from Doolittle and Pray's when Tom chanced to pass at a distance. Guy called out to him.

"Hello, you old sinner! Where you been this ever so long?" With a word to his friends, he puffed after Tom, and dragged him toward the group. "This is the guy they call the Whitelaw Baby. See how much he looks like Tad?"

"Tad'll give you Whitelaw Baby," came from one of the group. "Hates the name of it. Don't blame him, do you, when he's heard everyone gassing about the kid all through his life?"

But that he was going in Harvard by this nickname disturbed Tom not a little. Considering the legend in the Whitelaw family, and the resemblance between himself and Tad, it was natural enough. But should Tad hear of it . . .

With Tad he had no acquaintance. As the weeks passed by he came to understand that with certain freshmen acquaintance would be difficult. They themselves didn't want it. It was a discovery to Tom that it didn't follow that you knew a man, or that a man knew you, because you had been introduced to him. Guy Ansley had introduced him that day to the little

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group from Doolittle and Pray's; but when he ran into them again none of them remembered him.

So Tad Whitelaw did not remember him after having met him accidentally at Guy's. The meeting had been casual, hurried, but it was a meeting. The two had been named to each other. Each had made an inarticulate grunt. But when later that same afternoon they passed in a corridor Tad went by as if he had never seen him.

He continued to live and keep his mouth shut. If he was hurt there was nothing to be gained by saying so. Then an incident occurred which threw them together in a manner which couldn't be ignored inwardly, even if outward conditions remained the same.

Little by little the Harvard student, following the general sobering down which makes it harder for people in the twentieth century to laugh than it was to those who lived fifty years ago, was becoming less frolicsome. Pranks were still played, especially by freshmen, but neither so many nor so wild. The humor had gone out of them.

But in every large company of young men there are a few whose high spirits carry them away. Where they have money to spend and no cares as to the future on their minds, the new sense of freedom naturally runs to roistering. In passing Tad Whitelaw's rooms, which were also in Gore Hall, Tom often heard the banging of the piano, and those shouts of song and laughter which are likely to disturb the proctor. Guy, who was often the one at the piano, now and then gave him a report of a party, telling him who was at it, and what they had had to drink.

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In the course of the winter his relations with Guy took on a somewhat different tinge. In Guy's circle, commonly called a gang or a bunch, he was Guy's eccentricity. The Doolittle and Pray spirit allowed of an eccentricity, if it wasn't paraded too much. Guy knew, too, that it helped to make him popular, which was not an easy task, to be known as loyal to a boyhood's chum, when he might be expected to desert him.

But behind this patronage the fat boy found in Tom what he had always found, a source of strength. Not much more than at school did he escape at Harvard his destiny as a butt.

"Same old spiel, damn it," he lamented to Tom, "just because I'm fat. What difference does that make, when you're a sport all right? Doesn't keep me from going with the gang, not any more than Tad Whitelaw's big eyebrows, or Spit Castle's long nose."

On occasions when he was left out of "good things" which he would gladly have been in he made Tom come round to his room in the evening for confidence and comfort. Tom never made game of him. There was no one else to whom he could turn with the certainty of being understood. Having an apartment to himself, he could be free in his complaints without fear of interruption.

It was late at night. The two young men had been "yarning," as they called it, and smoking for the past two hours. Tom was getting up to go back to his room, when a sound of running along the corridor caught their attention.

"What in blazes is that?"

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By the time the footsteps reached Guy's door smothered explosions of laughter could be heard outside. With a first preliminary pound on the panels the door was flung open, Spit Castle and Tad Whitelaw hurling themselves in. Though they would have passed as sober, some of their excess of merriment might have been due to a few drinks.

Tad carried a big iron door-key which he threw with a rattle on the table. His hat had been knocked to the back of his head; his necktie was an inch off-center; his person in general disordered by flight. Spit Castle, a weedy youth with a nose like a tapir's, was in much the same state. Neither could tell what the joke was, because the joke choked them. Guy, flattered that they should come first of all to him, stood in the middle of the floor, grinning expectantly. Tom, quietly smoking, kept in the background, sitting on the arm of the chair from which he had just been getting up. As each of the newcomers tried to tell the tale he was broken in on by the other.

"Came out from town by subway . . ."

"Walking through Brattle Square . . ."

"Not so much as a damn cat about . . ."

"Saw little old johnny come abreast of little old bootstore . . ."

"Took out a key—opened the door—went into the shop in the dark—left the key in the keyhole to lock up when he comes outside again—just in for something he'd forgot."

"And damned if Tad didn't turn the key—quick as that—and lock the old beggar in."

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“Last we heard of him he was poundin’ and squealin’ to beat all blazes.”

Yellin’, ‘Pull-*ice!*—pull-*ice!*—’ whacking his leg, Spit gave an imitation of the prisoner—“and he’s in there yet.”

To Guy the situation was as droll as it was to his two friends. An old fellow trapped in his own shop! He was a Dago, Spit thought, which made the situation funnier. They laughed till, wearied with laughter, they threw themselves into armchairs, and lit their cigarettes.

Tom, who had laughed a little not at their joke but at them, felt obliged, in his own phrase, to butt in. He waited till a few puffs of tobacco had soothed them.

“Say, boys, don’t you think the fun’s gone far enough?”

The two guests turned and stared as if he had been a talking piece of furniture. Tad took his cigarette from his lips.

“What the hell business is it of yours?”

Tom kept his seat on the arm of the chair, speaking peaceably. “I suppose it isn’t my business—except for the old man.”

“What have you got to do with him? Is he your father?”

“He’s probably somebody’s father, and somebody’s husband. You can’t leave him there all night.”

Spit challenged this. “Why can’t we?”

“Because you can’t. Fellows like you don’t do that sort of thing.”

It looked as if Tad Whitelaw had some special

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animosity against him, when he sprang from his chair to say insolently, "And fellows like you don't hang round where they're not wanted."

"Oh, Tom didn't mean anything—" Guy began to interpose.

"Then let him keep his mouth shut, or—" he nodded toward the door—"or get out."

Tom kept his temper, waiting till Tad dropped back into his chair again. "You see, it's this way. The old chap has a home, and if he doesn't come back to it in the course of, let us say, half an hour his family'll get scared. If they hunt him up at the shop, and find he's been locked in, they'll make a row at the police station just across the street. If the police get in on the business they're sure to find out who did it."

"Well, it won't be you, will it?" Tad sneered again.

"No, it won't be me, but even you don't want to be . . ."

Tad turned languidly to Guy. "Say, Guy! Awful pity isn't it about little Jennie Halligan! Cutest little dancer in the show, and she's fallen and broken her leg."

Tom got up, walked quietly to the table, picked up the key, and at the same even pace was making for the door, when Tad sprang in front of him.

"Damn you! Where do you think you're going?"

"I'm going to let the old fellow out."

"Drop that key."

"Get out of my way."

"Like hell I'll get out of your way."

"Don't let us make a row here."

"Drop that key. Do you hear me?"

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The rage in Tad's face was at being disobeyed. He was not afraid of this fellow two inches taller than himself. He hated him. Ever since coming to Harvard the swine had had the impertinence to be called by the same name, and to look like him. He knew as well as anyone else the nickname by which the bounder was going, and knew that he, the bounder, encouraged it. It advertised him. It made him feel big. He, the brother of the Whitelaw Baby, had been longing to get at the fellow and give him a whack on the jaw. He would never have a better opportunity.

The lift of his hand and the grasp with which Tom caught the wrist were simultaneous. Slipping the key into his pocket, Tom brought his other hand into play, throwing the lighter-built fellow out of his path with a toss which sent him back against the desk. Maddened by this insult to his person, Tad picked up the inkstand on the desk, hurling it at Tom's head. The inkstand grazed his ear, but went smash against the wall, spattering the new wallpaper with a great blob of ink. Guy groaned, with some wild oburgation. To escape from the room Tom had turned his back, when a blow from an uplifted chair caught him between the shoulders. Wheeling, he wrenched the chair from the hands of Spit Castle, chucked it aside and dealt the young man a stinger that brought the blood from the tapir nose. All blind rage by this time, he caught the weedy youth's head under his right arm, pounding the face with his left fist till he felt the body sagging from his hold. He let it go. Spit fell on the sofa, which was spattered with blood,

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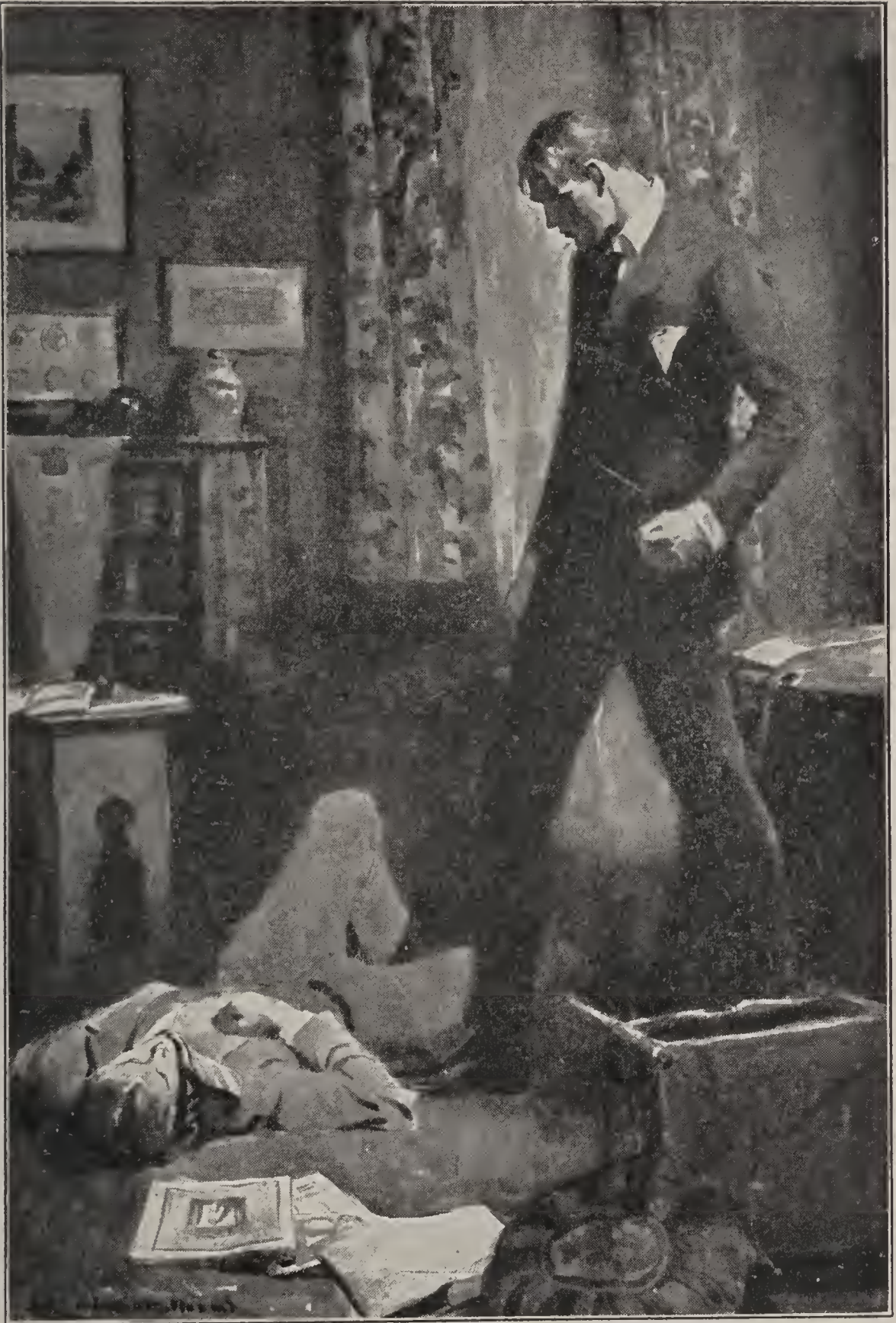
as the wallpaper with ink. Startled at the sight of the limp form, he stood for a second looking down at it, when his skull seemed crashed from behind. Staggering back, he thought he was going to faint, but the sight of Tad aiming another thump at him, straight between the eyes, revived him to berserker fury. He sprang like a lion on an antelope.

Strong and agile on his side, Tad was stiff to resistance. Before the sheer weight of Tom's body he yielded an inch or two, but not more. Freeing his left hand, as he bent backward, he dealt Tom a bruising blow on the temple. Tom disregarded it, pinning Tad's left arm as he had already pinned the right. His object now was to get the boy down, to force him to his knees. It was a contest of brutal strength. When it came to brutal strength the advantage was with the bigger frame, the muscles toughened by work. The fight was silent now, nearly motionless. Slowly, slowly, as iron gives way to the man with the force to bend it, Tad was coming down. His feet were twisted under him, with no power to right themselves. Two pairs of eyes, strangely alike, glared at each other, like the eyes of frenzied wild animals. Tad gave a quick little groan.

"O God, my leg's breaking."

Tom was not touched. "Damn you, let it break!"

Pressed, pressed, pressed downward, Tad was sinking by a fraction of an inch each minute. The strength above him was pitiless. Except for the running of water in the bathroom, where Guy had dragged Spit Castle to wash his nose, there was no sound in the room but the long hard pantings, now



"GET UP, I TELL YOU"

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from Tad's side, now from Tom's. In the intervals neither seemed to breathe.

Suddenly Tad collapsed, and went down. Tom came on top of him. The heavier having the lighter fastened by arms and legs, the two lay like two stones. The faces were so near together that they could have kissed. Their long protruding eyebrows brushed each other's foreheads. The weight of Tom's bulk squeezed the breath from his foe, as a bear squeezes it with a hug. Nothing was left to Tad but resistance of the will. Of that, too, Tom meant to get the better.

The words were whispered from one mouth into the other. "Do you know what I'm going to do with you?"

There was no answer.

"I'm going to take you back with me to let that old man out of his shop."

There was still no answer. Tom sprang suddenly off Tad's body, but with his fingers under the collar.

"Get up!"

He pulled with all his might. The collar gave way. Tad fell back. "Damned if I will," was all he could say by way of defiance.

Tom gave him a kick. "Get up, I tell you. If you don't I'll kick the stuffing out of you."

The kick hurt nothing but Tad's pride; but it hurt that badly. It hurt it so badly that he got up, with no further show of opposition. He dusted his clothes mechanically with his hands; he tried to adjust his torn collar. His tone was almost commonplace.

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"This has got to be settled some other time. What do you want me to do?"

Tom pointed to the door. "What I want you to do is to march. Keep ahead of me. And mind you if you try to bolt I'll wring your neck as if you were a cur. You—you—" He sought a word which would hit where blows had not carried—"you—coward!"

The flash of Tad's eyes was like that of Tom's own. "We'll see."

He went out the door, Tom close behind him.

It was a March night, with snow on the ground, but thawing. They were without overcoats, and bare-headed. A few motor cars were passing, but not many pedestrians.

"Run," Tom commanded.

He ran. They both ran. The distance being short, they were soon in Brattle Square. Tad stopped at a little shop, showing a faint light. There was too much in the way of window display to allow of the passer-by, who didn't give himself some trouble, to see anything within.

At first they heard nothing. Then came a whimpering, like that of a little dog, shut in and lonely, tired out with yelping. Putting his ear to the door, Tom heard a desolate, "Tam! Tam!" It was the only utterance.

"Here's the key! Unlock the door."

Tad did as he was bidden. Inside the "Tam! Tam!" ceased.

"Now go in, and say you're sorry."

As Tad hesitated Tom gave him a push. The door

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being now ajar the culprit went sprawling into the presence of his victim.

There was a spring like that of a cat. There was also a snarl like a cat's snarl. "You tam Harvard student!"

Feeling he had done and said enough, Tom took to his heels; but as someone else was taking to his heels, and running close behind him, he judged that Tad had escaped.

Back in his room, Tom felt spent. In his bed he was in emotional revolt against his victory. He loathed it. He loathed everything that had led up to it. The eyes that had stared into his, when the two had lain together on the floor, were like those of something he had murdered. What was it? What was the thing that deep down within him, rooted in the primal impulses that must have been there before there was a world—what was the thing that had been devastated, outraged? Once more, he didn't know.

XXXII

LIFE resumed itself next day as if there had been no dramatic interlude. Proud of the scrap, as he named it, which had taken place in his room, Guy made the best of it for all concerned. His version was tactful, hurting nobody's feelings. The trick on the old man was a merry one, and after a fight about its humor Tad Whitelaw and the Whitelaw Baby had run off together to let the old fellow out. Spit Castle's tapir nose had got badly hurt in the scrimmage, and bled all over the sofa. The splash of ink on the wall was further evidence that Guy's room was a rendezvous of sports. But sports being sports the honors had been even on the whole, and no hard feeling left behind. Tad and the Whitelaw Baby would now, Guy predicted, be better friends.

But of that there was no sign. There was no sign of anything at all. When the Whitelaw Baby met the Whitelaw Baby's brother they passed in exactly the same way as heretofore. You would not have said that the one was any more conscious of the other than two strangers who pass in Piccadilly or Fifth Avenue. In Tad there was no show of resentment; in Tom there was none of pride. As far as Tom was concerned, there was only a humiliated sense of regret.

And then, in April, life again took another turn. Coming back one day to his rooms, Tom found a

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message requesting him to call a number which he knew to be Mrs. Danker's. His first thought was of Maisie, with whom his letters had begun to be infrequent. Mrs. Danker told him, however, that Honey had had an accident. It was a bad accident, how bad she didn't know. Giving him the name of the hospital to which he had been taken, she begged him to go to him at once. After all the years they had lived with Mrs. Danker she considered them almost as relatives.

The hospital, near the foot of Grove Street, preserved the air of the sedate old Boston of the middle nineteenth century. Its low dome, its pillared façade, its grounds, its fine old trees, had been familiar to Tom ever since he had lived on Beacon Hill. In less than an hour after ringing up Mrs. Danker he was in the office asking for news.

News was scanty. Expecting everyone to understand what he meant to Honey and Honey meant to him, he had looked for the reception which friends in trouble and excitement give to the friend who brings his anxiety to mix with theirs. It would be, "Oh, come in. Poor fellow, he's suffering terribly. It happened thus and so." But to the interne in the office, a young man wearing a white jacket, Honey was not so much as a name. His case was but one among other cases. A good many came in a day. In a week, or a month, or a year, there was no keeping account of them, except as they were registered. Individual suffering was lost sight of in the immense amount of it. But the interne was polite, and said that if Tom would sit down he would find out.

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Among the hardest minutes Tom had ever gone through were those in the little reception room. Not only was there suspense; there was remorse. He had treated Honey like a cad. He had never been decent to him. He had never really been grateful. There had never been a minute, in the whole of the nearly six years they had lived together, in which he had not been sorry, either consciously or subconsciously, at being mixed up with an ex-convict. It was the ex-convict he had always seen before he had seen the friend.

A second interne wearing a white jacket came to question him, to ask him who he was, and the nature of his business with the patient. If he was only a friend he could hardly expect to see him. The man was under opiates, he needed to be kept quiet.

“What’s happened? What’s the matter with him? I can’t find out.”

The interne didn’t know exactly. He had been crushed. He was injured internally. The cause of the accident he hadn’t heard.

“Could I see his nurse?”

There was more difficulty about that, but in the end he was taken upstairs, where the nurse came out to the corridor to speak to him. She was a competent, businesslike woman, with none of the emotion at contact with pain which Tom thought must be part of a nurse’s equipment. But she could tell him nothing definite. Not having been on duty when the case had been brought in, she had heard no more than the facts essential to what she had to do.

“Do you think he’ll die?”

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“You’d have to ask the doctor that. He’s not dead now. That’s about as much as I can say.” At sight of the big handsome fellow’s distress she partly relented. “You may come in and look at him. You mustn’t try to speak to him.”

He followed her into a long ward, with an odor of disinfectant. White beds, mostly occupied, lined each wall. Here and there was one surrounded by a set of screens, partially secluding a sufferer. At one such set they stopped. Through an opening between two screens Tom was allowed to look at Honey who lay with face upturned, and no sign of pain on the features. He slept as Tom had seen him sleep hundreds of times when he expected to get up again next morning. The difference was in the expectation of getting up. Blinded by tears, Tom tiptoed away.

When he came next day the effect of the opiate had worn off, and yet not wholly. Honey turned his head at his approach and smiled. Sitting beside the bed, Tom took the big, calloused hand lying outside the coverlet, and held it in his own relatively tender one. More than ever it was borne in on him at whose cost that tenderness had been maintained. Honey liked to have his hand held. A part of the wall of aloofness with which he had kept himself surrounded seemed to have broken down.

A little incoherently he told what had happened. He had been stowing packing-cases in the hold of a big ship. The packing-cases were lowered by a crane. The crane as a rule was a good old thing, slow paced, gentle, safe. But this time something seemed to have gone wrong with her. Though his

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back was turned, Honey knew by the shadow above him that she was at her work. When he had got into its niche the case with which he was busy he would swing round and seize the new one. And then he heard a shout. It was a shout from the dock, and didn't disturb him. He was about to turn when something fell. It struck him in the back. It was all he knew. He thought he remembered the blow, but was not certain whether he did or not. When he "came to" he had already been moved to the shed, and was waiting for the ambulance. He seemed not to have a body any more. He was only a head, like one of them there angels in a picture, with wings beneath their chins.

He laughed at that, and with the laugh the nurse took Tom away; but when he came back on the following day Honey's mind was clearer.

"I've made me will long ago," he said, when Tom had given him such bits of news as he asked for. "It's all legal and reg'lar. Had a lawyer fix it up. Never told yer nothink about it. Everythink left to you."

"Oh, Honey, don't let us talk about that. You'll be up and around in a week or so."

"Sure I'll be up and around. Yer don't think a little thing like this is goin' to bust me. Why, I don't feel 'ardly nothink, not below the neck. All the same, it can't do no harm for you to know what's likely to be what. If I was to croak, which I don't intend to, yer'd have about sixteen hundred dollars what I've saved to finish yer eddication on. The will is in the bottom of me trunk at Danker's."

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On another day he said, "If anyone was to pop up and say I owed 'em that money, because I took it from 'em . . ."

He held the sentence there, leaving Tom to wonder if he had thoughts of restitution, or possibly of repentance.

"I don't owe 'em nothink," he ended. "Belonged to me just as much as it belonged to them. Nothink don't belong to nobody. I never was able to figger it out just the way I wanted to, because I ain't never had no eddication; but Gord's lor I believes it is Never could get the 'ang o' the lor o' man, not nohow."

To comfort him, Tom suggested that perhaps when he got through college he might be able to take the subject up.

"I wouldn't bind yer to it, Kiddy. Tough job! Why, when I give up socializin' to try and win over some o' them orthodoxes I thought as they'd jump to 'ear me. Not a bit of it! The more I told 'em that nothink didn't belong to nobody the more they said I was a nut."

Having lain silent for a minute he continued, with that light in his face which corresponded to a wink of the blind eye: "I don't bind yer to nothink, Kiddy. That's what I've always wanted yer to feel. You're a free boy. When I'm up and around again, and yer've got yer eddication, and have gone out on yer own, yer won't have me a-'angin' on yer 'ands. No, sir! I'll be off—free as a bird—back with the old gang again—and yer needn't be worried a-thinkin' I'll miss you—nor nothink!"

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It was a few days after this that the businesslike nurse who had first admitted him hinted that, if she were Tom, Honey would have a clergyman come to visit him. A few days more and it might be too late.

Honey with a clergyman! It was something Tom had never thought of. The incongruous combination made him smile. Nevertheless, it was what people who were dying had—a clergyman come to visit them. If a clergyman could do Honey any good . . .

“Honey,” he suggested, artfully, next day, “now that you’re pinned to bed for awhile, and have got the time, wouldn’t you like to see a clergyman sometimes, and talk things over?”

There was again that light in the face which took the place of a wink. “What things?”

Tom was nonplussed. “Well, I suppose, things about your soul.”

“What’d a clergyman know about *my* soul? He might know about his own, but I know all about mine that I’ve got to know. ’Tain’t much—but it’s enough.”

Tom was relieved. He didn’t want to disturb Honey by bringing in a stranger nor was he more sure than Honey that any good could be done by it. He was more relieved still when Honey explained himself further.

“Do yer suppose I’ve come to where I am now without thinkin’ them things out, when Gord give me a genius for doin’ it? I don’t say I’ve did it as well as them as has had more eddication; but Gord takes us with the eddication what we’ve got. Eddication’s a fine thing; I don’t say contrairy; but I don’t believe

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as it makes no diff'rence to Gord. If you and me was before Him—me not knowin' 'ardly nothink, and you stuffed as you are with learnin' till you're bustin' out with it—I don't believe as Gord'd say as there was a pinch o' snuff between us—not to him there wouldn't be." A little wearily he made his confession of faith. "Gord made me; Gord knows me; Gord'll take me just the way I am and make the best o' me, without no one else buttin' in."

It was the middle of an afternoon. If anything, Honey was better. All spring was blowing in at the windows, while the trees were in April green, and the birds jubilant with the ecstasy of mating.

"Beats everythink the way I dream," Honey confided, in a puzzled tone. "Always dreamin' o' my mother. Haven't 'ardly thought of her these years and years. Didn't 'ardly know her. Died when I was a little kid; and yet . . ."

He lay still, smiling into the air. Tom was glad to find him cheerful, reminiscent. Never in all the years he had known him had Honey talked so much of his early life as within the last few days.

"Used to take us children into the country to see a sister she had livin' there . . . Little village in Cheshire called King's Clavering. . . . See that little cottage now . . . Thatched it was . . . Set a few yards back from the lane. . . . Had flowers in the garden . . . musk . . . and poppies . . . and London pride . . . and Canterbury bells . . . and old man's love . . . and cherry pie . . . and raggedy

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Jack . . . and sailor's sweetheart . . . funny how all them names comes back to me . . .”

Again he lay smiling. Tom also smiled. It was the first day he had had any hope. It was difficult not to have hope when Honey was so free from pain, and so easy in his mind. As to pain he had not had much since the accident had benumbed him; but there had always been something he seemed to want to say. To-day he had apparently said everything, and so could spend the half-hour of Tom's visit on memories of no importance.

“Always had custard for tea, my mother's sister had. Lord, how us young ones'd . . .”

The recollection brought a happy look. Tom was glad. With pleasant thoughts Honey would not have the wistful yearning in his eyes which he had turned on him lately whenever he went away.

“There was a hunt in Cheshire. Onst I saw a lord—a dook, I think he was—ridin' to 'ounds. Sat his 'orse as if he was part of him, he did . . .”

This too died away without sequence, though the happy look remained. The smile grew rapt, distant perhaps, as memory took him back to long forgotten trifles. Just outside the window a robin fluted in a tree.

Honey turned his head slightly to say: “Have I been asleep, Kid?”

“No; you haven't had your eyes shut.”

“Oh, but I must have. Couldn't dream if I was wide awake. I saw ma—just as plain as—” He recovered himself with a light laugh—“Wouldn't it

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bust yer braces to 'ear me sayin' ma? But that's what us childern used to call . . .”

Once more he turned in profile, lying still, silent, radiant, occupied. The robin sang on. Tom looked at his watch. It was time for him to be stealing away. Now that Honey was better, he didn't mind going without a farewell, because he could explain himself next time. He was glancing about for the nurse when Honey said, softly, casually, as if greeting an acquaintance:

“Hello—ma!”

He lifted both hands, but they dropped back, heavily. Tom, who had half risen, fell on his knees by the bedside, seizing the hand nearest him in both his own.

“Honey! Honey! Speak to me!”

But Honey's good eye closed gently, while the head sagged a little to one side. The robin was still singing.

Two letters received within a few days gave Tom the feeling of not being quite left alone.

Dear Mr. Whitelaw

In telling you how deeply we feel for you in your great bereavement I wish I could make you understand how sincerely we are all your friends. I want to say this specially, as I know you have no family. Family counts for much; but friends count for something too. It is George Sand who says: “Our relations are the friends given us by nature; our friends are the relations given us by God.” Will you not think of us in this way?—especially of Guy and me. Whenever you are lonely I wish you would turn

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to us, in thought at least, when it can't be in any other way. When it can be—our hearts will always be open.

Very sincerely yours,

HILDRED ANSLEY.

The other letter ran:

Dear Tom

Now that you have got this great big incubous off your hands I should think you would try to do your duty by me and what you owe me. It seems to me I've been patient long enough. It is not as if you were the only peanut in the bag. There are others. I do not say this purposely. It is rung from me. I have done all I mean to do here, and will beat it whenever I get a good chance. I should think you would be educated by now. I graduated from high school at sixteen, and I guess I know as much as the next one. I've got a gentleman friend here, a swell fellow too, a travelling salesman, and he makes big money, and he says that if a fellow isn't hitting the world by fifteen he'll always be a quitter. Think this over and let me know. With passionate love.

MAISIE.

XXXIII

THE day after Honey was buried Tom went to Mrs. Danker's to pay what was owing on the room rent, and take away his effects. The effects went into one small trunk which Mrs. Danker packed, while Tom sat on the edge of the bed and listened to her comments. A little wiry woman, prim in the old New England way, she was tireless in work and conversation.

“He was a fine man, Mr. Honeybun was, and my land! he was fond of you. He'd try to hide it; but half an eye could see that he was that proud of you! He'd be awful up-and-coming while you was here, and make out that it didn't matter to him whether you was here or not; but once you was away—my land! He'd be that down you'd think he'd never come up again. And one thing I could see as plain as plain; he was real determined that when you'd got up in the world he wasn't going to be a drag on you. He'd keep saying that you wasn't beholdin' to him for anything; and that he'd be glad when you could do without him so that he could get back again to his friends; but my land! half an eye could see.”

During these first days Tom found the memory of a love as big as Honey's too poignant to dwell upon. He would dwell upon it later, when the self-reproach which so largely composed his grief had softened

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down. All he could do as yet was to curse himself for the obtuseness which had taken Honey at the bluff of his words, when the tenderness behind his deeds should have been evident to anyone not a fool.

He couldn't bear to think of it. Not to think of it, he asked Mrs. Danker for news of Maisie. He had often wondered whether Maisie might not have told her aunt in confidence of her engagement to himself; and now he learned that she had not.

"I hardly ever hear from her; but another aunt of Maisie's writes to me now and then. Says that that drummer fellow is back again. I hope he'll keep away from her. He don't mean no good by her, and she goes daft over him every time he turns up. My land! how do we know he hasn't a wife somewheres else, when he goes off a year and more at a time, on his long business trips? This time he's been to Australia. It was to get her away from him that I asked her to spend that winter in Boston; but now that he's back—well, I'm sure I don't know."

Tom had not supposed that at the suggestion of a rival he would have felt a pang; and yet he felt one.

"Of course, there's some one; we know that. It must be some one too who's got plenty of money, because he's given her a di'mond ring that must be worth five hundred dollars, her other aunt tells me, if it's worth a cent. We know he makes big money, because he's got a fine position, and his family is one of the most high thought of in Nashua. That's part of the trouble. They're very religious and toney, so they wouldn't think Maisie a good enough match for him. Still, if he'd only do one thing or the other,

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keep away from her, or ask her right out and out to marry him . . .”

Tom was no longer listening. The mention of Maisie's diamond had made him one hot lump of shame. He knew more of the cost of jewels now than when he had purchased the engagement ring, and even if he didn't know much he knew enough.

A few days later he was in Nashua. He went, partly because he had the day to spare before he took up college work again, partly because of a desire to learn what was truly in Maisie's heart, partly to make her some amends for his long neglect of her, and mostly because he needed to pour out his confession as to the diamond ring. Having been warned of his coming, Maisie, who had got rid of the children for an hour or two, awaited him in the parlor.

A little powder, a little unnecessary rouge, a sweater of imitation cherry-colored silk, gave her the vividness of a well-made artificial flower. Even Tom could see that, with her neat short skirt and high-heeled shoes, she was dressed beyond the note of the shabby little room; but if she would only twine her arms around his neck, and give him one of the kisses that used to be so sweet, he could overlook everything else.

Her eyes on the big square cardboard box he carried in his hand, she received him somberly. Having allowed him to kiss her, she sat down at the end of a table drawn up beside the window, while he put the box in front of her.

“What's this?”

He placed himself at the other end of the table,

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having its length between them. Because of his waning love, because of the ring above all, he had done one of those reckless things which sometimes render men exultant. From his slender means he had filched a hundred dollars for a set of furs. He watched Maisie's face as she untied knots and lifted the cover of the band-box.

On discovering the contents her expression became critical. She fingered the fur without taking either of the articles from the box. Turning over an edge of the boa, she looked at the lining. It was a minute or two before she took out the muff and held it in her hands. She examined it as if she were buying it in a shop.

"That's a last year's style," was her first observation. "It'll be regular old-fashioned by next winter, and, of course, I shouldn't want a muff before then. The girls'll think I got them second-hand when they're as out of date as all that. They're awful particular in Nashua, more like New York than Boston." She shook out the boa. "Those little tails are sweet, but they don't wear them now. How much did you give?"

He told her.

"They're not worth it. It's the marked-down season too. Some one's put it over on you. I could have got them for half the price—and younger. These are an old woman's furs. The girls'll say my aunt in Boston's died, and left them to me in her will."

Brushing them aside, she faced him with her resentful eyes. Her hands were clasped in front of her, the diamond flashing on the finger resting on a

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table-scarf of thin brown silk embroidered in magenta ferns.

“Well, Tom, what’s your answer to my letter?”

At any other minute he would have replied gently, placatingly; but just now his heart was hot. A hundred dollars had meant much to him. It would have to be paid back in paring down on all his necessities, in food, in carfares, even in the washing of his clothes. He too clasped his hands on the table, facing her as she faced him. He remembered afterward how blue her eyes had been, blue as lapis lazuli. All he could see in them now was demand, and further demand, and demand again after that.

“Have I got to give you an answer, Maisie? If so, it’s only the one I’ve given you before. We’ll be married when I get through college, and have found work.”

“And when’ll that be?”

“I’m sorry to say it won’t be for another two years, at the earliest.”

“Another two years, and I’ve waited three already!”

“I know you have. But listen, Maisie! When we got engaged I was only sixteen. You were only eighteen. Even now I’m only nineteen, and you’re only twenty-one. We’ve got lots of time. It would be foolish for us to be married . . .”

She broke in, drily. “So I see.”

“You see what, Maisie?”

“What you want me to see. If you think I’m dying to marry you . . .”

“No, I’m not such an idiot as that. But if we’re in love with each other, as we used to be . . .”

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"As you used to be."

"As I used to be of course; and you too, I suppose."

"Oh, you needn't kill yourself supposing."

He drew back. "What do you mean by that, Maisie?"

"What do you think I mean?"

"Well, I don't know. It sounds as if you were trying to tell me that you'd never cared anything about me."

"How much did you ever care about me?"

"I used to think I couldn't live without you."

"And you've found out that you can."

"I've had to, for one thing; and for another, I'm older now, and I know that nobody is really essential to anybody else. All the same—"

"Yes, Tom; all the same—what?"

"If you'd be willing to take what I can offer you—"

"Take what you can offer me! You're not offering me anything."

He explained his ambitions, for her as well as for himself. Life was big; it was full of opportunity; his origin didn't chain any man who knew how to burst its bonds. He did know. He didn't know how he knew, but he did. He just had it in him. When you knew you had it in you, you didn't depend on anyone to tell you; you yourself became your own corroboration.

But in order to fulfil this conviction of inner power you needed to know things. You needed the experience, the standing, the rubbing up against other men, which you got in college in a way that you didn't get

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anywhere else. You got some of it by going into business, but only some of it. In any case, it was no more than a chance in business. You might get it or you might not. With the best will in the world on your part, it might slip by you. In college it couldn't slip by you, if you had any intelligence at all. All the past experience of mankind was gathered up there for you to profit by. You could only absorb a little of it, of course. But you acquired the habit of absorbing. It was not so much what you learned that gave college its value; it was the learning of a habit of learning. You got an attitude of mind. Your attitude of mind was what made you, what determined your place in the world. With a closed mind you got nowhere; with an open mind the world was as the sea driving all its fish into your net. College opened the mind; it was the easiest method by which it could be done. If she would only be patient till he had got through the preliminary training and had found the job for which he would be fitted . . .

“But what's the use of waiting when you can get a job for which you'd be fitted right off the bat? There's a family up here on the hill that wants a shofer. They give a hundred and twenty-five a month. Why go to all that trouble about opening your mind when here's the job handed out to you? The gentleman-friend I told you about says that business has got college skinned. He says colleges are punk. He says lots of men in business won't take a man if he's been to college. They'd want a fellow with some get-up-and-get to him.”

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He began to understand her as he had never done before. Maisie had the closed mind. She was Honey's "orthodock," the type which accepts the limitations other people fix for it. He registered the thought, long forming in his mind subconsciously, that among American types the orthodock is the commonest. It was not true, as so often assumed, that the average American is keen to forge ahead and become something bigger than he is. That was one of the many self-flattering American ideals that had no relation to life. Mrs. Ansley's equality of opportunity was another. People passed these phrases on, and took for granted they were true, when in everyday practice they were false.

There could be no breaking forth into a larger life so long as the national spirit made for repression, suppression, restriction, and denial. Maisie was but one of the hundred and sixteen millions of Americans out of a possible hundred and seventeen on whom all the pressure of social, industrial, educational, and religious life had been brought to bear to keep her mind shut, her tastes puerile, and her impulses to expansion thwarted. With a great show of helping and blessing the less fortunate, American life, he was coming to believe, was organized to force them back, and beat them into subjection. The hundred and seventeenth million loved to believe that it wasn't so; it was not according to their consciences that it should be so; but the result could be seen in the hundred and sixteen million minds drilled to disability, as Maisie's was.

A young man not yet hardened to life's injustices, he saw himself rushing to Maisie's aid, to make the

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best of her. Experience would help her as it had helped him. The shriveled bud of her mind would unfold in warmth and sunshine. This would be in their future together. In the meantime he must clear the ground of the present by getting rid of pretence.

“There’s one thing I want to tell you, Maisie, something I’m rather ashamed of.”

The lapis lazuli eyes widened in a look of wonder. He might be going to tell her of another girl.

“You know, as I’ve just said, that when we got engaged I was only sixteen. I didn’t know anything about anything. I thought I did, of course; but then all fellows of sixteen think that. I’d never had anyone to teach me, or show me the right hang of things. You saw for yourself how I lived with Honey; and before that, as you know, I’d been a State ward. Further back than that—but I can’t talk about it yet. Some day when we’re married, and know each other better—”

“I’m not asking you. I don’t care.”

“No, I know you don’t care, and that you’re not asking me; but I want you to understand how it was that I was so ignorant, so much more ignorant than I suppose any other fellow would have been. When I went out to buy that ring you’ve got on—”

He knew by the horror in her face that she divined what he had to tell her. He knew too that she had already been afraid of it.

“You’re not going to say that it isn’t a real diamond?”

To nerve himself he had to look at her steadily. Confessing a murder would have been easier.

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“No, Maisie, it isn’t a real diamond. At the time I bought it I didn’t know what a real diamond was. I’m not sure that I know now—”

He stopped because, without taking her eyes from his, she was slipping the ring from her finger. She was slipping, too, an illusion from her mind. He knew now that to be trifled with in love, to be betrayed in a great trust, would be small things to Maisie as compared to this kind of deception. Her wrath and contempt were the more scathing to behold because of her cherry-colored prettiness.

The ring lay on the table. Drawing in the second finger of her right hand, she made of it a spring against her thumb. She loosed the spring suddenly. The faked diamond sped across the table hitting against his hand. He picked it up, putting it out of sight in his waistcoat pocket. For a fellow of nineteen, eager to be something big, no lower depth of humiliation could ever be imagined.

Maisie stood up. “You cheap skate!”

He bowed his head as a criminal sometimes does when sentenced. He had no protest to make. A cheap skate was what he was. He sat there crushed. Skirting round him as if he were defiled, she went out into the little entry.

He was still sitting crushed when she came back. She did not pause. She merely flung his hat on the table as she went by. It was a cheap skate’s hat, a brown soft felt, shapeless, weather-stained, three years out of style. With no further words, she opened the door into the adjoining room, passed through it, and closed it noiselessly behind her.

XXXIV

FOR probating Honey's will he asked leave to come and consult Mr. Ansley. An appointment was made for an evening when that gentleman was to be at home.

Tom, who had some gift for character, was beginning to understand him. Understanding him, it seemed to him that he understood all that old Boston which had once been a national institution, a force in the country's history, and now, like a man retired from business, sat resting on its hill.

Old Boston was more significant, however, than a man retired from business, in that it was to a great degree a man retired from the pushing of ideals. Generous once with the hot generosity of youth, keen to throw itself into the fight against wrongs, ready to be slaughtered in the van rather than compromise on principles, old Boston had now reached the age of mellowness. It had grown weary in well-doing. It had done enough. Contending with national evils had proved to be futile. National evils had grown too big, too many, too insurgent. Better make the best of life as your people mean to live it. Keep quiet; take it easy; save money; let the country gang its own gait. A big turbulent country, with no more respect for old Boston than for the prophet Jeremiah, it wallowed in prosperous vul-

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garity. Let it wallow! With solid investments in cotton and copper old Boston could save its own soul. It withdrew from its country; it withdrew from its state; it withdrew from its own city. Where its ancestors had made the laws and administered them, it became, like those proud old groups of Spaniards still to be found in California, a remnant of a former time, making no further stand against the invader. With a little art, a little literature, a little music, a little education, a little religion, a little mild beneficence, and a great deal of astute financial and professional ability, it could pass its time and keep its high-mindedness intact.

To Tom's summing up this was Philip Ansley. He was able, public-spirited, and generous; but he was disillusioned. The United States of his forefathers, of which he kept the ideal in his soul, had turned into such a hodgepodge of mankind, that he had neither hope nor sentiment with regard to it. In his heart he believed that its governments were in the hands of what he called a bunch of crooks. With congresses, state legislatures, and civic councils elected by what to him were hordes of ignoramuses, with laws dictated by cranks and fanatics, with the old-time liberties stampeded by the tyranny of majorities lacking a sense of responsibility, he deemed it prudent to follow the line of least resistance and give himself to making money. Apart from casting his vote for the Republican ticket on election days, he left city, state, and country to the demagogues and looters. He was sorry to do this, yet with the world as it was, he saw no help for it.

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But he served as director on the boards of a good many companies; he was an Overseer of Harvard, a trustee of the Museum of Fine Arts, the treasurer of several hospitals, a subscriber to every important philanthropic fund. His club was the Somerset; his church was Trinity. For old Boston these two facts when taken together placed him in that sacred shrine which in England consecrates dowager duchesses.

When Tom was shown up he found his host in the room where two years earlier they had talked over the place as chauffeur, but he was no longer awed by it. Neither was he awed by finding Ansley wearing a dinner-jacket simply because it was evening. The conventions and amenities of civilized life were becoming a matter of course to him.

“How d’ye do? Come in. Sit down. What’s the weather like outside? Still pretty cold for April, isn’t it?”

Though he offered his hand only from his arm-chair, where he sat reading the evening paper, he offered it. It was also a tribute to Tom’s progress that he was asked to take a seat. A still further sign of his having reached a position remotely on a footing of equality with the Ansleys was an invitation to help himself from a silver box of cigarettes.

Having respectfully declined this honor, as Ansley himself was not smoking, he stated his errand. If Mr. Ansley would introduce him to some young inexpensive lawyer, who would tell him what to do in the probating of Honey’s will . . .

The business was soon settled. In possession of Ansley’s card with a scribbled line on it, Tom rose to

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take his leave. Ansley rose also, but moved toward the fireplace, where a few sticks were smoldering, as if he had something more to say.

“Wait a minute. Sit down again. Have a cigarette.”

As Ansley himself lighted a cigar, Tom took a cigarette from the silver box, and leaned against the back of the big chair from which he had just risen. Once more he was struck by the resemblance between the shrewd close-lipped face, dropping into its meditative cast, and the lampshade just below it, parchment with a touch of rose, and an inner light. Ansley puffed for a minute or two pensively.

“You’ve no family, I believe. You haven’t got the complications of a lot of relatives.”

Tom was surprised by the new topic. “No, sir. I wish I had, but—”

“Oh, well, for a young fellow like you, bound to get on—” He dropped this line to take up another. “I’m thinking about Guy. Occurred to me the other day that while he’d been dragged about Europe a good many times he didn’t know anything of his own country. Never been west of the Hudson.”

Tom smoked and wondered.

“I’ve suggested to him to take his summer’s vacation and wander about. Get the lay of the land. Could cover a good deal of ground in three months. Zigzag up and down—Niagara—Colorado—Chicago—Grand Canyon—California—Seattle—back if he liked by the Canadian Pacific. What would you think?”

“I think it would be great.”

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“Would you go with him?”

It seemed to Tom that his brain was spinning round. Not only was he too dazed to find words, but the question of money came first. How could he afford . . . ?

But Ansley went on again. “It’s a choice between you and a tutor. My wife would like a tutor. Guy wants you. So do I. You’d have your traveling expenses, of course—do everything the same as Guy—and, let us say, five hundred dollars for your time. Would that suit you?”

He didn’t know how to answer. Excitement, gratitude, and a sense of insufficiency churned together and choked him. It was only by spluttering and stammering that he could say at last:

“If—if Mrs. Ansley—d-doesn’t w-want me—”

“Oh, she’d give in. Simply feels that Guy’d get more good out of it if he had some one to point out moral lessons as he went along. I don’t. Two young fellows together, if they’re at all the right kind, ’ll do each other more good than all the law and the prophets.”

“But would you mind telling me, sir, something of what you’d expect from me?”

“Oh, nothing! Just play round with him, and have a good time. You seem to chum up with him all right.”

Tom was distressed. “Yes, sir, but if I’m to be—to be paid for chumming up with him I should have to—”

“Forget it. I want Guy to take the trip. It’s not the kind of trip anyone wants to take alone, and

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you're the fellow he'd like to have with him. I'd like it too. You understand him."

He turned round to knock the ash from his cigar into the dying fire.

"Trouble with Guy is that he has no sense of values. Thing he needs to learn is what's worth while and what's not. I don't want you to teach him. I just want him to *see*. What do you say?"

Tom hung his head, not from humility but to think out a point that troubled him.

"You know, sir"—he looked up again—"that when Guy and I get together we talk about things that—well, that you mightn't like."

"I don't care a hang what you talk about."

"Yes, sir; but this is something particular."

"Well, then, keep it to yourself."

"I can't keep it to myself because—because some day you might think that I'd had a bad . . . as long as we've just been chums . . . and I wasn't paid—"

Ansley moved away from the fireplace, striding up and down in front of it.

"Look here, my boy! I know what young fellows are. I know you talk about things you wouldn't bring up before Mrs. Ansley and me. I don't care. It's what I expect. Do you both good. You're not specially vicious, either of you, and even if you were—"

"It's not a matter of morals, sir; it's one of opinions."

He dismissed this lightly. "Oh, opinions!"

"But this is a special kind of opinion. You see, sir, I've always been poor. I've lived among poor

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people. I've seen how much they have to go without. And I begin to see all that rich people have more than they need—more than they can ever use."

"Oh, quite so! I see! I see! And you both get a bit revolutionary. Go to it, boy! Fellows of your age who're not boiling over with rebellion against social conditions as they are 'll never be worth their salt. Don't say anything about it before Mrs. Ansley, but between yourselves. . . . Why, when I was an undergraduate . . . You'll live through it, though. . . . The poor people don't want any champions. . . . They don't want to be helped. . . . You get sick of it in the long run. . . . But while you're young boil away. . . . If that's all that bothers you. . . ."

Tom explained that it was all that bothered him, and the bargain was struck. He had expressed his thanks, shaken hands, and reached the threshold on the way out when Ansley spoke again.

"Guy tells me that out at Cambridge they call you the Whitelaw Baby. I suppose you know all about yourself—your people—where you began—that sort of thing?"

He decided to be positive, laconic, to do what he could to squelch the idea in Ansley's mind.

"Yes, sir; I do."

"Then that settles that."

XXXV

BETWEEN the end of the college year and the departure on the journey westward there was to be an interval of three weeks. Mrs. Ansley had insisted on that. She was a mother. For eight or nine months she had seen almost nothing of her boy. Now if he was to be taken from her for the summer, and for another college year after that, she might as well not have a son at all.

Tom was considering where he should pass the intervening time when the following note unnerved him.

Dear Mr. Whitelaw

Mother wants to know if when college closes, and Guy joins us in New Hampshire, you will not come with him for the three weeks before you start on your trip. Please do. I shall have got there by that time, and I haven't seen you now for nearly two years. We must have a lot of notes to compare, and ought to be busy comparing them. Do come then, for our sakes if not for your own. You will give us a great deal of pleasure.

Yours very sincerely,

HILDRED ANSLEY.

His heart failed him. It failed him because of the details as to customs, etiquette, and dress he didn't know anything about. He should be called on to speak fluently in a language of which he was only

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beginning to spell out the little words. It seemed to him at first that he couldn't accept the invitation.

Then, not to accept it began to look like cowardice. He would never get anywhere if he funk'd what he didn't know. When you didn't know you went to work and found out. You couldn't find out unless you put yourself in the way of seeing what other people did. After twenty-four hours of reflection he penned the simplest form of note. Thanking Hildred for her mother's kind invitation, he accepted it. Before putting his letter in the post, however, he dropped in to call on Guy. Guy, who was strumming the Love-Death of Isolde, tossed his comments over his shoulder as he thumped out the passion.

"That's Hildred. She's made mother do it. Nutty on that sort of thing."

Tom's heart failed him again. "Nutty on what sort of thing?"

Isolde's anguish mounted and mounted till it seemed as if it couldn't mount any higher, and yet went on mounting. "Oh, well! She's toted it up that you haven't got a home—that for three weeks after college closes you'll be on the town—and so on."

"I see."

"All the same, come along. I'd just as soon. Dad won't be there hardly. The old lady'll be booming about, but you needn't mind her. You'll have your room and grub for those three weeks, and that's all you've got to think about. Anyhow, it's bats in the attic with Hildred the minute it comes to a lame dog."

While Guy's fat figure swayed over the piano, Isolde's great heart broke. Tom went back to his

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room and wrote a second answer, regretting that owing to the pressure of his engagements he would be unable . . .

And then there came another reaction. What did it matter if Hildred Ansley *was* opening the door out of pity? Pity was one of the loveliest traits of character. Only a cad would resent it. He sent his first reply.

Having done this, he felt it right to go and call on Mrs. Ansley. He was sure she didn't want him in New Hampshire, but by taking it for granted that she did he would discount some of her embarrassment.

As Mrs. Ansley was not at home Pilcher held out a little silver tray. Tom understood that he should have had a card to put in it. A card was something of which he had never hitherto felt the need. He said so to Pilcher frankly.

Pilcher's stony medieval face, the face of a saint on the portal of some primitive cathedral, smiled rarely, but when it did it smiled engagingly.

"You'll find a visitin' card very 'andy, Mr. Tom, now that you're so big. Mr. Guy has had one this long spell back."

It was a lead. In shy unobtrusive ways Pilcher had often shown himself his friend. Tom confessed his yearning for a card if only he knew how to order one.

"I'll show you one of Mr. Guy's. He always has the right thing. I'll find out too where he gets them done. If you'll step in, Mr. Tom . . ."

As he waited in the dining room, with the good-natured Ansley ancestor smiling down at him, there

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floated through Tom's mind a phrase from the Bible as taught by Mrs. Tollivant. "The Lord sent His angel." Wasn't that what He was doing now, and wasn't the angel taking Pilcher's guise? When the heavenly messenger came back with the card Tom went straight to his point.

"Pilcher, I wonder if you'd mind helping me?"

"I'd do it and welcome, Mr. Tom."

Mr. Tom told of his invitation to New Hampshire, and of his ignorance of what to do and wear. If Pilcher would only give him a hint . . .

He could not have found a better guide. Pilcher explained that a few little things had to be as second nature. A few other little things were uncertain points as to which it was always permissible to ask. In the way of second nature Tom would find sporting flannels and tennis shoes an essential. So he would find a dinner-jacket suit, with the right kind of shirt, collar, tie, shoes, and socks to wear with it. As to things permissible to ask about, Pilcher could more easily explain them when they were both in the same house. Occasions would crop up, but could not be foreseen.

"The real gentry is ever afraid of showin' that they don't know. They takes not knowin' as a joke. Many's the time when I've been waitin' at table I've 'eard a born gentleman ask the born lady sittin' next to 'im which'd be the right fork to use, and she'd say that she didn't know but was lookin' round to see what other people done. That's what they calls hease of manner, Mr. Tom."

Under the Ansley roof he would meet none but the

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gentry born. Any one of them would respect him more for asking when he didn't know. It was only the second class that bothered about being so terribly correct, and they were not invited by Mrs. Ansley. In addition to these consoling facts Tom could always fall back on him, Pilcher, as a referee.

Being a guest in a community in which two years earlier he had been a chauffeur Tom found easier than he had expected because he worked out a formula. He framed his formula before going to New Hampshire.

"Servants are servants and masters are masters because they divide themselves into classes. The one is above, and is recognized as being above; the other is below, and is recognized as being below. I shall be neither below nor above; or I shall be both. I will *not* go into a class. As far as I know how I'll be everybody's equal."

He had, however, to find another formula for this.

"You're everybody's equal when you know you are. Whatever you know will go of itself. The trouble I see with the bumptious American, who claims that he's as good as anybody else, is that he thinks only of forcing himself to the level of the highest; he doesn't begin at the bottom, and cover all the ground between the bottom and the top. I'm going to do that. I shall be at home among the lot of them. To be at home I must *feel* at home. I mustn't condescend to the boys of two years ago who'll still be driving cars, and I mustn't put on airs to be fit for Mrs. Ansley's drawing-room. I must be myself. I mustn't be ashamed because I've been in a

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humble position; and I mustn't be swanky because I've been put in a better one. I must be natural; I must be big. That'll give me the ease of manner Pilcher talks about."

With these principles as a basis of behavior, his embarrassments sprang from another source. They began at the station in Keene. He knew he was to be met; and he supposed it would be by Guy.

"Oh, here you are!"

She came on him suddenly in the crowd, tall, free in her movements, always a little older than her age. If in the nearly two years since their last meeting changes had come to him, more had apparently come to her. She was a woman, while he was not yet a man. She was easy, independent, taking the lead with natural authority. From the first instant of shaking hands he felt in her something solicitous and protective.

It showed itself in the little things as to which awkwardness or diffidence on his part might have been presumed. So as not to leave him in doubt of what he ought to do, she took the initiative with an air of quiet, competent command. She led the way to the car; she told him to throw his handbags and coat into the back part of it; she made him sit beside her as she drove.

"No, I'm going to drive," she insisted, when he had offered to take the wheel. "I want you to see how well I can do it. I like showing off. This is my own car. I drove it all last summer."

They talked about cars and their makes because the topic was an easy one.

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Speeding out of Keene, they left behind them the meadows of the Ashuelot to climb into a country with which Nature had been busy ever since her first flaming forces had cooled down to form a world. Cooling down and flinging up, she had tossed into the azoic age a tumble of mountains higher doubtless than Andes or Alps. Barren, stupendous, appalling, they would not have been easy for man, when he came, to live with in comfort, had not the great Earth-Mother gone to some pains to polish them down. Taking her leisure through eons of years, she brought from the north her implement, the ice. Without haste, without rest, a few inches in a century, she pushed it against the barrier she meant to mold and penetrate.

As a dyke before the pressure of a flood, the barrier broke here, broke there, and yet as a whole maintained itself. Heights were cut off from heights. Valleys were carved between them. What was sharp became rounded; what was jagged was worn smooth. The highest pinnacles crashed down. When after thousands of years the glacial mass receded, only the stumps were left of what had once been terrific primordial elevations.

Dense forests began to cover them. Lakes formed in the hollows. Little rivers drained them, to be drained themselves by a nameless stream which fell into a nameless sea. Through ages and ages the thrushes sang, the wild bees hummed, and the bear, the deer, the fox, the lynx ranged freely.

Man came. He came stealthily, unnoted, leaving so light a trace that nothing remains to tell of his

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first passage but a few mysterious syllables. The river once nameless became the Connecticut; the base of a mighty primeval mountain bears the Nipmuck name Monadnock.

In this angle of New Hampshire thrust in between Massachusetts and Vermont names are a living record. The Nipmuck disappeared in proportion as the restless English colonists pushed farther and farther from the sea. They came in little companies, generally urged by some religious disagreement with those they had left behind. To escape the "Congregational way" they fled into the mountains. There they were free to follow the "Episcoparian way." As "Episcoparians" they printed the map with names which enshrined their old-home memories. Clustering within sight of the blue mass of Monadnock are neat white towns—Marlborough, Richmond, Chesterfield, Walpole, Peterborough, Fitzwilliam, Winchester—rich with "Episcoparian" suggestion.

In the early eighteenth century there came in another strain. Driven by famine, a thousand pilgrims arrived in these relatively empty lands from the North of Ireland, sturdy, strong-minded, Protestant. Grouping themselves into three communities, they named them with Irish names, Antrim, Hillsborough, Dublin. It was to Dublin that Tom and Hildred were on the way.

The subject of cars exhausted, she swung to something else.

"You like the idea of going with Guy?"

"It's great."

"I like it too. I'd rather he was with you than

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with anybody. You never make game of him, and yet you never humor him."

"What do you mean by that, that I never humor him?"

"Oh, well! Guy's standards aren't very high. We know that. But you never lower yours."

"How do you know I don't?"

"Because Guy says so. Don't imagine for a minute that he doesn't see. He likes you so much because he respects you."

"He respects a lot of other fellows too."

A little "H'm!" through pursed-up lips was a sign of dissent. "I wonder. He goes with them, I know, and rather envies them, which is what I mean by his standards not being very high; but—"

"Oh, Guy's all right. The fellows you speak of are sometimes a little fresh; but he knows where to draw the line. He'll go to a certain point; but you won't get him beyond it."

"And he owes that to you."

"Oh, no, he doesn't, not in the least."

"Well, *I* —" she held the personal pronoun for emphasis—"think he does."

In this good opinion she was able to be firm because she seemed older than he. In reality she was two years younger, but life in a larger society had given her something of the tone of a woman of the world. This development on her part disconcerted him. So long as she had been the slip of a thing he remembered, prim, sedate, old-fashioned as the term is applied to children, she had not been a factor in his relations with the Ansley family. Now, sud-

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denly, he saw her as the most important factor of all. The emergence of personality troubled him. Since she was obliged to keep her eyes on the turnings of the road, he was able to study her in profile.

It was the first time he had really looked at a woman since he had summed up Maisie in Nashua. That had been two months earlier. The place which Maisie had so long held in his heart had been empty for those two months, except for a great bitterness. It was the bitterness of disillusion, of futility. Rage and pain were in it, with more of mortification than there was of either. He would never again hear of a cheap skate without thinking of the figure he had cut in the eyes of the girl whom he thought he was honoring merely in being true. All girls had been hateful to him since that day, just as all boys will be to a dog who has been stoned by one of them. Yet here he was already looking at a girl with something like fascination.

That was because fascination was the emotion she evoked. She was strange; she was arresting. You wondered what she was like. You watched her when she moved; you listened to her when she talked. Once you had heard her voice, bell-like and crystalline, you would always be able to recall it.

He noticed the way she was dressed because her knitted silk sweater was of a pattern he had never seen before. It ran in horizontal dog-toothed bands, shading from green to blue, and from blue to a dull red. Green was the predominating color, grass-green, jade-green, sea-green, sage-green, but toned to sobriety by this red of old brick, this blue of indigo. Indigo

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was the short plain skirt, and the stockings below it. An indigo tam-o'-shanter was pinned to her smooth, glossy, bluish-black hair with a big carnelian pin. He remembered that he used to think her Cambodian. He thought so again.

Having arrived at the house, they found no one but Pilcher to receive them. Mrs. Ansley had gone out to tea; Mr. Guy had left word for Miss Hildred to bring Mr. Tom to the club, where he was playing tennis.

"Do you care to go?"

Knowing that he couldn't spend three weeks in Dublin without facing this invitation, he had decided in advance to accept it the first time it came.

"If you go."

"All right; let's. But you'd like first to go to your room, wouldn't you? Pilcher, take Mr. Whitelaw up. I'll wait here with the car. We'll start as soon as you come down." Running up the stairs, he wondered whether it would be the proper thing for him to change to his new white flannels, when, as if divining his perplexity, she called after him. "Come just as you are. Don't stop to put on other things. I'll go as I am too."

This maternal foresight was again on guard as they turned from the road into the driveway to the club.

"Do you want to come and be introduced to a lot of people, or would you rather browse about by yourself? You can do whichever you like."

He replied with a suggestion. As a good many cars would be parked in the narrow space of the

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club avenues, he thought she had better jump out at the club steps, leaving him to find a space where the car could stand. He would hang around there till Guy's game was over and the party was ready to go home.

Having parked the car, he was in with the chauffeurs, some of whom were old acquaintances. True to his formula, he went about among them, shaking hands, and asking for their news. They were oddly alike, not only in their dustcoats and chauffeurs' caps, but in features and cast of mind.

"You got a job?" he was asked in his turn.

"Been taken on to travel with young Ansley. We stay here for three weeks, and then go out west."

"Loot pretty good?"

"Oh, just about the same, and, of course, I get my expenses."

"Pretty soft, what?" came from an Englishman.

"Yes, but then it's only for the summer."

These duties done, he felt free to stroll off till he found a convenient rock on which to sit by the lake-side. Lighting a cigarette, he was glad of a half hour to himself in which to enjoy the scene. It was a reposeful scene, because all that was human and sporting in it was lost in the living spirit of the background.

It was what he had always felt in this particular landscape, and had never been able to define till now—its quality of life. It was life of another order from physical life, and on another plane. You might have said that it reached you out of some phase of creation different from that of Earth. These hills were living

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hills; this lake was a living lake. Through them, as in the serene sky, a Presence shone and smiled on you. He had often noticed, during the summer at the inn-club, that you could sit idle and silent with that Presence, and not be bored. You looked and looked; you thought and thought; you were bathed about in tranquillity. People might be running around, and calling or shouting, as they were doing now in the tennis courts on a ledge of the hillside above him, not five hundred yards away, but they disturbed you no more than the birds or the butterflies. The Presence was too immense, too positive, to allow little things to trouble it. Rather, it took them and absorbed them, as if the Supreme Activity, which for millions of years before there was a man had been working to transform this spot into a cup of overflowing loveliness, could use anything that came Its way.

So he sat and smoked and thought and felt soothed. It was early enough in the summer for the birds to be singing from all the wooded terraces and the fringe of lakeside trees. Calls from the tennis courts, cries from young people climbing on the raft in the lake or diving from the spring-board, came to him softened and sweet. It was living peace, invigorating, restful.

XXXVI

A WOMAN passed along the driveway, and looked at him. He looked at her. The rock on which he sat being no more than a dozen yards from where she walked, they could see each other plainly. It seemed to him that as she went by she relaxed her pace to study him. She was a little woman, pretty, sad-faced, neatly dressed and perhaps fifty years of age. Having passed once, she turned on her steps and passed again. She passed a third time and a fourth. Each time she passed she gave him the same long scrutinizing look, without self-consciousness or embarrassment. He thought she might be a lady's maid or a chauffeur's wife.

He turned to watch a young man taking a swan dive from the spring-board. Having run the few steps which was all the spring-board allowed of, he stood poised on the edge, feet together, his arms at his thighs. With the leap forward his arms went out at right angles. When he turned toward the water they bent back behind his head, his palms twisted upward. Nearing the surface they pointed downward, cleaving the lake with a clean, splashless penetration. The whole movement had been lithe and graceful, the curve of a swan's neck, the spring of a flying fish.

Not till she was close beside him did he notice that the little woman had left the roadway, crossed the

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intervening patch of blueberry scrub, and seated herself on a low boulder close to his own.

Her self-possession was that of a woman with a single dominating motive. "You've just arrived with Miss Ansley, haven't you?"

The voice, like the manner, was intense and purposeful. In assenting, he had the feeling of touching something elemental, like hunger or fire, which wouldn't be denied.

"And you're at Harvard."

He assented to this also.

"At Harvard they call you the Whitelaw Baby, don't they?"

"I've heard so. Why do you ask?"

"Because I'm the nurse from whom the Whitelaw baby was stolen nearly twenty years ago. My name is Nash."

A memory came to him of something far away. He could hear Honey saying he had seen her, a pretty little Englishwoman, and that Nash was her name. Looking at her now, he saw that she was more than a pretty little Englishwoman; she was a soul in torture, with a flame eating at the heart. He felt sorry for her, but not so sorry as to be free from impatience at the dogging with which the Whitelaw baby followed him.

"Why do you say this to me?"

"Because of what I've heard from the family. They've spoken of you. They think it—queer."

"They think what queer?"

"That your name is Whitelaw—that your father's name was Theodore—that you look so much like the

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rest of them. Mr. Whitelaw's name is Henry Theodore—"

"And my father's name was only Theodore. My mother's name was Lucy. I was born in The Bronx. I'm exactly nineteen years of age. I've heard that Mr. Whitelaw's son if he were living now would be twenty."

Large gray eyes with silky drooping lids rested on his with a look of long, slow searching. "You're sure of all that?"

He tried to laugh. "As sure as you can be of what's not within your own recollection. I've been told it. I've reason to believe it."

"I'd no reason to believe that I should ever find my boy again; but I know I shall."

"That must be a comfort to you in the trial you've had to face."

"It hasn't been a trial exactly, because you bear a trial and live through it. This has been spending every day and every night in the lake of fire and brimstone. I wonder if you've any idea of what it's like."

"I don't suppose I have."

"If you did have—" He thought she was going to say that if he did have he would allow himself to become the Whitelaw baby in order to relieve her anguish, but she struck another note. "I hadn't the least suspicion of what had been done to me till the two footmen had lifted the little carriage up over the steps and into the hall. Then I raised the veil to take my baby out, and I—I fell in a dead swoon."

He waited for her to go on again.

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“Try to imagine what it is to find in place of the living child you’ve laid in its bed with all the tenderness in your soul—to find in place of that a dirty, ugly, stuffed thing, about a baby’s size. . . . For days after that I was just as if I was drugged. If I came to for a few minutes I prayed that I mightn’t live. I didn’t want to look the mother and father in the face.”

“But hadn’t you told them anything about it?”

“There was nothing to tell. The baby had vanished. I’d seen nothing; I’d heard nothing. Neither had my friend who was with me, and who’s married now, in England. If an evil spirit had done it, it couldn’t have been silenter, or more secret. It was a mystery then; it’s been a mystery ever since.”

“But you raised an alarm? You made a search?”

“The whole country raised the alarm. There wasn’t a corner, or a suspicious character, that wasn’t searched. We knew it had been done for ransom, and the ransom was ready if ever the baby had been returned. The father and mother were that frantic they’d have done anything. There never was a baby in the world more loved, or more lovable. All three of us—the father, the mother, and myself—would have died for him.”

He grew interested in the story for its own sake. “And did you never get any idea at all?”

“Nothing that ever led to anything. For a good five years Mr. Whitelaw never rested. Mrs. Whitelaw—but it’s no use trying to tell you. It can’t be told; it can’t be so much as imagined. Even when you’ve lived through it you wonder how you ever did. You wonder how you go on living day by day. It’s

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almost as if you were condemned to eternal punishment. The clues were the worst.”

“You mean that—?”

“If we could have known that the child was dead—well, you make up your mind to that. After a while you can take up life again. But not to know anything! Just to be left wondering! Asking yourself what they’re doing with him!—whether they’re giving him the right kind of food!—whether they’re giving him *any* kind of food!—whether they’re going to kill him, and how they’re going to kill him, and who’s to do the killing! To go over these questions morning, noon, and night—to eat with them, and sleep with them, and wake with them—and then the clues!”

“You said they were the worst.”

“Because they always made you hope. No matter how often you’d been taken in you were ready to be taken in again. Each time they said there was a chance you couldn’t help thinking that there *might* be a chance. It didn’t matter how much you told yourself it wasn’t likely. You couldn’t make yourself believe it. You felt that he’d *have* to be found, that he couldn’t help being found. The whole thing was so impossible that you’d have to go to his room and look at his little empty crib to persuade yourself that he wasn’t there.”

To divert her from going over the ground she must have gone over thousands of times already, he broke in with a new line of thought.

“But I’ve heard that they don’t want to find him now—a grown-up man.”

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She stared at him fiercely. "I do. I want to find him. They were not to blame. I was. It makes the difference."

"Still he was their son."

"He was their son, and they've suffered; but they can rest in spite of their suffering. I can't. They can afford to give up hope because they've nothing with which to reproach themselves. If they were me—"

He began to understand. "I see. If you could find him and bring him back, even if they didn't want him—"

"I should have done *that* much. It would be something. It's why I pleaded with them to let me stay with them when I suppose the very sight of me must have tortured them. I swore that I'd give my life to trying to—"

"But what could you do when even the child's father, with all his money, couldn't—?"

"I could pray. They couldn't. They're not like that. Praying's all I've ever done which wasn't done by somebody else. I've prayed as I don't think many people have ever prayed; and now I've come to where—"

"Where what?"

The light in her eyes was lambent, leaping and licking like a flame.

"Where I'm quieter." She made her statement slowly. "I seem to know that he'll be given back to me because the Bible says that when we pray believing that we *have* what we ask for we shall receive it. Latterly I've believed that. I haven't forced myself

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to believe it. It's just come of its own accord—something like a certainty."

The claim in the look which without wavering fixed itself upon him prompted another question. "And has that certainty got anything to do with me?"

"I wonder if it hasn't."

"But I don't see how it can have, when you never saw me in your life till twenty minutes ago."

"I never saw you; but I'd heard of you. I meant to see you as soon as I got a chance. I never got it till to-day."

"But how did you know?"

"That it was you? This way. You see I'm here with Miss Lily. She's staying for a few nights at the inn-club before going to make some visits."

"Who's Miss Lily?"

"She was the second of the two children born after my little boy was taken. First there was Mr. Tad. Then there was a little girl. She knows Miss Ansley. Miss Ansley told her you were coming up, that you'd very likely be here this afternoon, so I came and waited. Even if I hadn't seen you drive up with her—if we'd met in the heart of Africa—I'd have known. . . . You've been taken for Mr. Tad already. You know that, don't you?"

"I know there's a resemblance."

"It's more than a resemblance. It's—it's the whole story. Mr. Whitelaw himself saw it first. When he came back after meeting you, in this very place, nearly two years ago, he was—well, he was terribly upset. If it hadn't been for Mr. Tad and Miss Lily—"

"And their mother too."

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“Yes, I suppose; and their mother too. But that’s not what we’re considering. Whether they want you or not, if you *are* the boy—”

He tried to speak very gently. “But you see, I couldn’t be. I had a mother. I don’t remember much about her because I was only six or seven when she died. But two things I recall—the way she loved me, and the way I loved her. If I thought there was any truth in what you—in what you suspect—I couldn’t love her any more.”

“I don’t see why.”

“Because I should be charging her with a crime. Would you do that—to your own mother—after she was dead?”

“If she was dead it wouldn’t matter.”

“Not to her. But it would to me.”

“It couldn’t do you any harm.”

“I’m the only judge of that.”

There was exasperation in the eyes which seemed unable to tear themselves from his face.

“But most people would like to have it proved that they’d been—”

“Been born rich men’s sons. That’s what you were going to say, isn’t it? I daresay I should have liked it, if . . . But what’s the use? We don’t gain anything by discussing it. You want to find some one who’ll pass for the lost boy. I understand that; and I understand how much it would lessen all the grief—”

She interrupted quickly. “Yes, but I wouldn’t try to foist an imposter on them, not if it would take me out of hell. If I didn’t believe—”

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“But you don’t believe now; you can’t believe. What I’ve told you about myself must make believing impossible.”

“Oh, if I hadn’t believed when believing was impossible I shouldn’t have the little bit of mind I’ve got now. Believing when it was impossible was all that kept me sane.”

“But you won’t go on doing it, not as far as I’m concerned?”

She rose, with dignity. “Why not? I shan’t be hurting you, shall I? In a way we all believe it—even the Whitelaw family—even Miss Ansley.”

He jumped up, startled. “Did she tell you so?”

“She didn’t tell me so exactly. We were talking about it—we’ve all talked of it more than you suppose—and Miss Ansley said that you couldn’t be what you are unless you were—*somebody*.”

He tried to take this jocosely. “No, of course I couldn’t.”

“Oh, but I know what she meant.” She moved away from him, speaking over her shoulder as she crossed the blueberry scrub, “It was more than what’s in the words.”

XXXVII

EXCEPT for a passing glimpse in Dublin, Tom never saw Lily Whitelaw till in December he met her at the ball at which Hildred Ansley came out. As to going to this ball he had his usual fit of funk, but Hildred had insisted.

"But, Tom, you must. You're the one I care most about."

"I shouldn't know what to do."

"I'll see to that. You'll only have to do what I tell you."

"And I haven't got an evening coat with tails."

"Well, get one. If you look as well in it as you do in your dinner-jacket outfit—and you'd better have a white waistcoat, a silk hat, and a pair of white gloves: What'll happen to you when you get there you can leave to me. Now that I know you look so well, and dance so well, you'll give me no trouble at all."

Her kindness humbled him. He felt the necessity of taking it as kindness and nothing more. Knowing too that he must school his own emotions to a sense of gratitude, he imagined that he so schooled them.

With the five hundred dollars he had earned through the summer added to what remained of Honey's legacy, he had enough for his current year at Harvard, with a margin over. The tailed evening coat, the white waistcoat, the silk hat, the gloves, he looked upon as an investment. He went to the ball.

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It was given at the Shawmut, the new hotel with a specialty in this sort of entertainment. The ball-room had been specially designed so as to afford a spectacle. A circular cup, surrounded by a pillared gallery for chaperons and couples preferring to "sit out," you descended into it by one of four broad shallow staircases, whence the *coup d'oeil* was superb.

By being more or less passive, he got through the evening better than he had expected. Knowing scarcely anyone, he fell back on his formula.

"I mustn't be conscious of it. I must take not knowing anyone for granted, as I should if I were in a crowd at a theater, or the lobby of this hotel. If I feel like a stray cat I shall look like a stray cat. If I feel at ease I shall look at ease."

In this he was supported by the knowledge of wearing the right thing. Even Guy, whom he had met for a minute in the cloakroom, had been surprised into a compliment.

"Gee whiz! Who do you think you are? The old lady's been afraid you'd look like an outsider. Now she'll be struck silly. Lot of girls here that you'll put their eye out."

When he had shaken hands Hildred found a minute in which to whisper, "Tom, you're the Greek god you read about in novels. Don't feel shy. All you need do is to stand around and be ornamental. Your rôle is the romantic unknown." She returned after the next bout of "receiving." "You and I will have the supper dance. I've insisted on that, and mother's given in. Don't get too far out of reach, so that I can put my hand on you when I want you."

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He danced a little, chiefly with girls whom no one else would dance with and to whom some member of the Ansley family introduced him. When not dancing he returned to the gallery, where he leaned against a convenient pillar and looked on. It was what he best liked doing. Liking it, he did it well. He could hear people ask who he was. He could hear some Harvard fellow answer that he was the Whitelaw Baby. Once he heard a lady say, as she passed behind his back, "Well, he does look like the Whitelaws, doesn't he?"

The New York papers had recalled the Whitelaw baby to the public mind in connection with the ball given a few weeks earlier to "bring out" Lily Whitelaw. Once in so often the whole story was rehearsed, making the younger Whitelaws sick of it, and their parents suffer again. The fact that Tad and Lily Whitelaw were there that night gave piquancy to the presence of the romantic stranger. His stature, his good looks, his natural dignity, together with the mystery as to who he was, made him in a measure the figure of the evening.

From where he stood by his pillar in the gallery he recognized Lily in the swirl below, a slim, sinuous creature in shimmering green. All her motions were serpentine. She might have been Salome; she might also have been a shop girl, self-conscious and eager to be noticed. Whatever was outrageous in the dances of that autumn she did for the benefit of her elders.

When she turned toward him he could see that she had an insolent kind of beauty. It was a dark, spoiled beauty that seemed lowering because of her heavy

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Whitelaw eyebrows, and possibly a little tragic. In thought he could hear Hildred singing, as she had sung when he stayed with them at Dublin in the spring, "Is she kind as she is fair? For beauty lives by kindness." Lily's beauty would not. It was an imperious beauty, willful and inconsiderate.

He saw Hildred dancing too. She danced as if dancing were an incident and not an occupation. She had left more important things to do it; she would go back to more important things again. While she was at it she took it gayly, gracefully, as all in the evening's work, but as something of no consequence. She was in tissue of gold like an oriental princess, a gold gleam in her oriental eyes. An ermine stole as a protection against draughts was sometimes thrown over her shoulders, but more often across her arm.

He noticed the poise of her head. No other head in the world could have been so nobly held, so superbly independent. Its character was in its simplicity. Fashion did not exist for it. The glossy dark hair was brushed back from forehead and temples into a knot which made neatness a distinction. Distinction was the chief beauty in the profile, with its rounded chin, its firm, small, well-curved lips, and a nose deliciously snub. Decision, freedom, unconsciousness of self, were betrayed in all her attitudes and movements. Merely to watch her roused in him a dull, aching jealousy for Lily. He surprised himself by regretting that Lily hadn't been like this.

Imperious, willful, and inconsiderate Lily seemed to him again as she drank champagne and smoked cigarettes at supper. The party at her table, which

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was near the one at which he sat with Hildred, was jovial and noisy. Lily's partner, a fellow whom he knew by sight at Harvard, drank freely, laughed loudly, and now and then slapped the table. Lily too slapped the table, though she did it with her fan.

In the early morning—it might have been two o'clock—Tom found himself accidentally near her when Hildred happened to be passing.

“Oh, Lily! I want to introduce Mr. Whitelaw. He's got the same name as yours, hasn't he? Tom, do ask her to dance.”

With her easy touch-and-go she left them to each other. Without a glance at him, Lily said, tonelessly,

“I'm not going to dance any more. I'm going to look for my brother and go home.”

A whoop from the other side of the ballroom, where a rowdy note had come over the company, gave an indication of Tad's whereabouts. Tom suggested that he might find him and bring him up. Lily walked away without answering.

Hildred hurried back. “I'm sorry. I saw what she did. Try not to mind it.”

“Oh, I don't. I decided long ago that one couldn't afford to be done down by that sort of thing. It pays in the end to forget it.”

“One of these days she'll be sorry she did it. Your innings will come then.”

“I'm not crazy for an innings. But time does avenge one, doesn't it?” He nodded toward the ballroom floor, where Lily, with a stalking, tip-toeing tread was pushing a man backward as if she would have pushed him down had he not recovered his

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balance and begun pushing her. "It avenges one even for that. Two minutes ago she said she wasn't going to dance any more."

"Well, she's changed her mind. That's all. Come and take a turn with me."

The affectionate solicitude in her tone was not precisely new to him, but for the first time he dared to wonder if it could be significant. By all the canons of life and destiny she was outside his range. She could take this intimate, sisterly way with him, he had reasoned hitherto, because she was so far above him. She was the Queen; he was only Ruy Blas, a low-born fellow in disguise. If he found himself loving her, if there was something so sterling and womanly in her nature that he couldn't help loving her, that would be his own lookout. He had made up his mind to that before the end of his three weeks in Dublin in the spring. Her tactful camaraderie then had carried him over all the places which in the nature of things he might have found difficult, doing it with a sweet assumption that they had an aim in common. Only they had no aim in common! Between him and her there could be nothing but pity and kindness on the one side, with humility and devotion on the other.

He had felt that till to-night. He had felt it to-night up to the minute of hearing those words, "Come and take a turn with me." The difference was in her voice. It had tones of comfort and encouragement. More than that, it had tones of comprehension and concern. She entered into his feelings, his struggles, his sympathies, his defeats. In the very way in

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which she put one hand on his shoulder and placed the other within his own he thought there might be more than the conventional gesture of the dance.

“You don’t know how much I appreciate your coming to-night,” she said, when she found an opportunity. “If you hadn’t come I should have felt it as much as if father, or mother, or Guy hadn’t come. More, I think, because—well, I don’t know why—*because*. I only believe that I should have. It’s been an awful bore to you, too.”

“No, it hasn’t. I’ve seen a lot. I like to get the hang of—of this sort of thing. I don’t often get a chance.”

“I thought of that. It seemed to me that the experience would be something. Everything’s grist that comes to your mill, so that the more you see of things the better.”

That was all they said, but when he left her she held his hand, she let him hold hers, till their arms were stretched out to full length. Even then her eyes smiled at him, and his smiled down into hers.

Having seen other people go, he decided to slip away himself. But in the cloakroom he found Tad, white and sodden in a chair, his hands thrust into his trousers’ pockets, his legs stretched wide apart in front of him. No one was there but the cloakroom attendant who winked at Tom, as one who would understand the effect of too much champagne.

“Too young a head. Ought to be got home.”

“I’ll take him. Know where he lives. Going his way. Ask some one to call us a taxi.”

Tad made no remonstrance as they helped him into

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his overcoat, and rammed his hat on his head. He knew what they were doing. "Home!" he muttered. "Home bes' place! Bed! God, I cou' go to sleep right now."

He did go to sleep in the taxi, his head on Tom's shoulder. Tom held him up, with his arm around his waist. Once more he had the feeling that had stirred in him before, of something deeper than the common human depths, primitive, pre-social, antedating languages and laws. "He's not my brother," he declared to himself, "but if he were . . ." He couldn't end that sentence. He could only feel glad that, since the boy *had* to be taken home, the task should have fallen to him.

At Westmorley Court, where Tad now had his quarters, there was no difficulty of admittance. In his own room he submitted quietly to being undressed. Tom even found a suit of pajamas, stuffing the limp form into it. He got him into bed; he covered him up. Winding his watch, he put it on the night-table. All being done, he stooped over the bed to lift the arm that had flung aside the bedclothes, and put it under them again.

He staggered back. There flashed through his mind some of the stories by which Honey had accounted for the loss of his eye. His own left eye felt smashed in and shattered. He was sick; he was faint. He could hardly stand. He could hardly think. The room, the world, were flying into splinters.

"You damn sucker! Get out of this!"

By the time Tom had recovered himself Tad was settling to sleep.

XXXVIII

NOTHING but the knowledge that the boy was drunk had kept him from striking back there and then. His temper was a hot one. It came in fierce gusts, which stormed off quickly. The quickness saved him now. Before he was home in bed he had reconciled himself to bearing this thing too. It was bigger to bear it, more masculine, more civilized. He would never forget his racking remorse after the last fight.

He didn't lose his eye, but he was obliged to see an oculist. The oculist pronounced it a close shave.

"Where in thunder did you get that?" Guy demanded, a day or two after the occurrence.

Tom thought it an opportunity to learn whether or not the boy had been conscious of what he did. "Ask Tad Whitelaw."

"*What?* You don't mean to say you've had another row with him! Gee whiz!"

"No, I haven't had another row with him; but all the same, ask him."

Guy asked him, with no information but that the mucker would get another if he didn't keep out of the way. It was all Tom needed to know. He had not been too drunk to strike with deliberate intention, and to remember that he had struck.

Guy must have told Hildred, because she wrote

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begging Tom to come to see her. He wasn't to mind his black eye, because she knew all about it. She was tender, consoling.

"I don't believe he's a cad any more than I believe that of Lily," she said, while giving him a cup of tea, "but they're both spoiled with money and a sense of self-importance. You see, losing the other child has made their mother foolish about them. She's lavished everything on them, more than anyone, not a born saint, could stand. It would have been a great deal better if they'd had to fight their way—some of their way at any rate—like you."

"Oh, I'm another breed."

"Another figurative breed—yes. As to the breed in your blood—"

"Oh, but, Hildred, you don't believe that poppy-cock."

Her eyes were on the teapot from which she was pouring. "I don't believe it exactly because I don't know. It only strikes me as being very queer."

"Queer in what way?"

"Oh, in every way. They think so too."

"Then why do they seem to hate me so?"

"I shouldn't say they did that. They're afraid of you. You disturb them. They're—what do they call it in the Bible?—kicking against the pricks. That's all there is to it. When they'd buried the whole thing you come along and make them dig it up again. They don't want to do that. They feel it's too late. You can see for yourself that for Tad and Lily it would be awkward. When you've been the only two children, and such spoiled ones at that, to have an

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elder brother you didn't know anything about suddenly hoisted over you—"

"Of course! I understand that."

"Mr. Whitelaw feels the same, only he feels it differently. *He'd* accept him, however hard it was."

"And Mrs. Whitelaw?"

"Oh, poor dear, she's suffered so much that all she asks is not to be made to suffer any more. I don't believe it matters to her now whether he's found or not, so long as she isn't tortured."

"And does she think I'd torture her?"

"They haven't come to that. It isn't what you *may* do, but what they themselves *ought* to do that troubles them."

"I wish if you get a chance you'd tell them that they needn't do anything."

"They wouldn't take my word for it, or yours either. It rests with themselves and their own consciences."

"A good deal of it rests with me."

"Yes, if you were willing to take the first step; but since you're not—"

They dropped it at that because Mrs. Ansley lilted in, greeting Tom with that outward welcome and inward repugnance he had had to learn to swallow. He knew exactly where he stood with her. She took him as an affliction. Affliction could visit the best families and ignore the highest merits. Guy, dear boy, was extravagant, and this was the proof of his extravagance. He was infatuated with this young man, who had neither means, antecedents, nor connections. She had heard the Whitelaw Baby theory, of course; but so long as the Whitelaws themselves



MRS. ANSLEY TOOK HIM AS AN AFFLICTION

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rejected it, she rejected it too. The best she could do was to be philanthropic. Philip, Guy, Hildred, were all convinced that this young man was to make his mark. Very well! It was in her tradition, it was in the whole tradition of old Boston, to help those who were likely to get on. It was part of what you owed to your standing in the world, a kind of public duty. You couldn't slight it any more than royalty can slight the opening of bazaars. An aunt of her own had helped a poor girl to take singing lessons; and the girl became one of the great prima donnas of the world. Whenever she sang in opera in Boston it was always a satisfaction to the family to exhibit her as their protégée. So it might one day be with this young man. She hoped so, she was sure. She didn't like him; she thought the fuss made over him by Hildred and Guy, more or less abetted by their father, an absurdity; but since she was obliged to play up to the family standard of beneficence, up to it she would play. She bore with Tom, therefore, wisely and patiently, never snubbing him except when they chanced to be alone, and hurting him only as a jelly-fish hurts a swimmer, by clamminess of contact.

Clamminess of contact being in itself a weapon of offense, Tom ran away from it, but only to fall into contact of another kind.

It was a cloudy afternoon with Christmas in the near future. All over town there were notes of Christmas, in the shop windows, in the Christmas trees exposed for sale, in the way people ran about with parcels. He never approached this season without going back to that fatal Christmas Eve when he

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and his mother had been caught shoplifting. He could still feel as he felt at the minute when he turned his face to the angle of the police-station wall, and wept silently. He wondered what Hildred would think of him if he were to tell her that tale. He wondered if he ever should.

Partly for the exercise, partly to find space to breathe and to think, he followed the Boston embankment of the Charles, making his way to the Harvard Bridge, and so toward Cambridge. In big quietly dropping flakes it had begun to snow. Presently it was snowing faster. The few pedestrians fled from the esplanade. He tramped on alone, enjoying the solitude.

The embankment lamps had been lit when he noticed, coming toward him, two young men, their collars turned up about their ears. They were laughing and smoking cigarettes. Drawing nearer, he recognized them as Tad Whitelaw and the fellow who had slapped the table at the dance. It was not hard to guess that they were on their way to see Hildred. He hoped that under cover of the darkness and the snow he might slip by unobserved.

But Tad stopped squarely in front of him. "Let's look at your eye."

The tone was so easy and friendly that Tom thought he might be going to apologize. He let him look.

"Well, you got that," Tad went on. "Another time you'll get worse. By God, if you don't keep away from me I'll shoot you."

Tom was surprised, but it was the sort of situation

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in which he could be cool. He smiled into the arrogant young face turned up toward his.

“What’s the good of that line of talk? You know you wouldn’t shoot me; you wouldn’t have the nerve. Besides, you haven’t anything to shoot me *for*. I’ll leave it to this fellow.” He turned to Tad’s companion, who stood as a spectator, slightly to one side. “I found him dead drunk the other night. I took him home in a taxi, and put him to bed. That’s no more than the common freemasonry among men. Any man would do the same at a pinch for any other man.”

The companion played up nobly. “That’s the straight dope, Tad. Take it and gulp it down. This guy is a good guy or he wouldn’t have—”

“Go to hell,” Tad interrupted, insolently. “I’m only warning him. If he hangs round me any more—”

Tom kept his temper by main force, addressing himself still to the companion.

“I’ve never hung round him. He knows I haven’t. Two or three times I’ve run into him, as I’ve done to-day. Twice I’ve stepped in, to keep him from getting the gate, this time as a drunk, the other time as a damn fool. I’d do that for anyone. I’d do it for him, if I found him in the same mess again.”

“That’s fair enough, Tad,” the referee approved. “You can’t kick against it.”

Tad tried to speak, but Tom went on with quiet authority.

“So that since he likes warnings he can take that one. I shan’t let him be chucked out of Harvard if I can help it.”

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Tad sprang. "The devil you won't!"

Tom continued to speak only to the third party. "No, the devil I won't! I don't know why I feel that way about him, but that's the way I feel. And anyhow, now he knows."

Still addressing the companion only, he uttered a curt "Good-night." The companion responded civilly with "Good-night" on his side.

He neither looked at Tad, nor flung a word at him. Wheeling to face what had now blown into a snow-storm, he walked off into its teeth. But as he went he repeated the question he had put to Hildred Ansley.

"Why do they seem to hate me so?"

He thought of Lily, slippery, snake-like, perverted; he thought of the mother as he had seen her on that one day, in that one glimpse, a quivering bundle of agony; he thought of the father, human, sympathetic, with the iron in his soul.

Then he saw them with their heaped up money, their luxuries, their pride, their domineering self-importance. He knew just enough of the lives they led, the exemptions they enjoyed, to feel Honey's protest on behalf of the dispossessed.

Near an arc-light he stopped abruptly. The snow made a tabernacle for him, so that he was all alone. As he looked upward and outward millions and millions of sweet soft white things flew silently across the light. Out of his heart, up to his lips, there tore the kind of prayer which in times of temptation the Tollivant habit sometimes wrung from him:

"O God, keep me from ever wanting to be one of them!"

XXXIX

IN January, 1917, it began to occur to Tom White-law that he might have to go and fight. He might possibly be killed. Worse than that, he might be crippled or blinded or otherwise rendered helpless.

He had followed the war hitherto as one who looks on at tragedies which have nothing to do with himself. Europe was to him no more than a geographical term. Intense where his own aims and duties were concerned, but lacking the imaginative faculty, he had never been able to take England, France, and Germany as realities. The horrors of which he read in newspapers moved him less than a big human story on the stage. That the struggle might suck him into itself, smashing him as a tornado smashes a tree, came home to him first at a Sunday evening supper with the Ansleys.

"If it does come," Philip Ansley said, complacently, "a lot of you young fellows will have to go and be shot up."

"I'm on," Guy announced readily. "If it hadn't been for the family I'd have enlisted in Canada long ago."

His mother took this seriously. "Well that, thank God, can't happen to us. Darling, with your—"

"Oh, yes, with my fat! Same old bunk! But,

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mother, I'm losing weight like a snowbank in April. It's *running* away. I'm exercising; I'm taking Turkish baths; I don't hardly eat a damn thing. I weighed two-fifty-three six weeks ago, and now I'm down to two-forty-nine."

"Don't worry," his father assured him. "You'll get there. You'll make a fine target for Big Bertha. Couldn't miss you any more than she would a whole platoon."

"Philip, how can you!"

"Oh, they're all crazy to go." He looked toward Tom. "Suppose you are too. Exactly the big husky type they like to blow into hash."

Turning to help himself from the dish Pilcher happened to be passing, Tom's eyes encountered Hildred's. Seated beside him, she had veered round on hearing her father's words. The alarm in her face was a confession.

"Oh, I can wait," he tried to laugh. "If I've got to go I will, but I'm not tumbling over myself to get there."

A half hour later Mrs. Ansley and the three younger members of the party were in the music room, where Guy was at the piano. The mother sat on a gilded French canapé, making an excuse for keeping Hildred beside her. Tom had already begun to guess that the friendship between Hildred and himself was making Mrs. Ansley uneasy. For all these years she had taken him as Guy's protégé with whom "anything of that kind" was impossible. But lately she had so maneuvered as not to leave Hildred and himself alone. Whether Hildred noticed it or

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not he couldn't tell, since she never made a counter-move. If she was not unconscious of her mother's strategy she let it appear as if she was.

All the while Guy chimed out the *Carillon de Cythère* of Couperin le Grand Mrs. Ansley patted Hildred's hand, and rejoiced in her two children. Guy's touch was velvety because it was Guy's; Couperin le Grand was a noble composer because Guy played him. Her amorphous person quivered to the measure, with a tremor here and a dilation there, like the contraction and expansion of a medusa floating in the sea.

But when Guy had tinkled out the final notes she bubbled to her feet.

"Darling, I don't think I ever heard you play as well as you're doing this winter. I think if you were to give a private recital . . ."

In the general movement Tom lost the rest of this suggestion, but caught on again at a whisper which he overheard.

"Hildred, I simply must go and take my corsets off. I've had them on ever since I dressed for church. It's Nellie's evening out. I'll have to ask you to come and help me."

But as her mother was kissing Guy good-night Hildred managed to say beneath her breath, "Don't go away. I'll try to come back. There's something I want to speak about."

Left to themselves, the two young men exchanged bits of college gossip while Guy twirled on the piano stool. They had the more to say to each other since they met less often than in their year at Gore Hall.

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Guy was now in Westmorley Court, and Tom in one of the cheaper residential halls in the Yard. Their associations would have tended to put them apart, had not Guy's need of moral strengthening, to say nothing of a dog-like loyalty, driven him back at irregular intervals upon his old friend. Now and then, too, when his mother insisted on his coming home for the Sunday evening meal, Hildred suggested that he bring Tom.

"Let's hike it in by the Embankment," was Guy's way of extending this invitation. "I don't mind if you come along, and Hildred likes it. Dad don't care one way or another. He isn't democratic like Hildred and me; but he's only a snob when it comes to his position as one of the grand panjandrums of Boston. Mother kicks, of course; but then she'd accept the devil himself if I was to tote him behind me."

Long usage had enabled Tom to translate these sentiments into terms of eagerness. Guy really wanted him. He was Guy's haven of refuge as truly as when they had been growing boys. Every few weeks Guy turned from his "bunch of sports," or his "bunch of sports" left him in the lurch, so that he came back like a homing pigeon to its roost. Tom was fond of him, was sorry for him, bore with him. Moreover, beyond these tactless invitations there was Hildred.

They fell to talking of Tad Whitelaw. Guy swung round to the piano, beating out a few bars of throbbing, deep-seated grief.

"One more little song and dance and Tad'll get this. Know what it is?"

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Confessing that he didn't know, Tom learned that it was Händel's Dead March in "Saul."

"Played at all the British military funerals, to make people who feel bad enough already feel a damn sight worse. Be our morning and evening hymn when we get into the trenches."

Tom was anxious. "You mean that Tad's on probation?"

"I don't what he's on. Hear the Dean's been giving him a dose of kill-or-cure. That's all." He pounded out the heartbreaking chords, with the deep bass note that sounded like a drum. "Ever see a fellow named Thorne Carstairs?"

"Seen him, yes. Don't know him. Yale chap, isn't he?"

"Was." The drumbeat struck sorrow to the soul. "Kicked out. Hanging round Tad till he gets him kicked out too. Lives at Tuxedo. Stacks of dough, just like Tad himself." There was some personal injury in Guy's tone, as he added, "Like to give him the toe of my boot."

It was perhaps this feat of energy that sent him into the martial phrases of the Chopin polonaise in A major, making the room ring with joyous bravery.

Having dropped into Mrs. Ansley's corner of the gilded canapé, Tom found Hildred silently slipping into a seat beside him.

"No, don't get up." She put her hand on his arm in a way she had never done before. "I can only stay a few minutes. There's something I want to say."

Guy was passing to the D major movement. His back was turned to them. They sat gazing at each

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other. They sat gazing at each other in a new kind of avowal. All the things he dared not say and she dared not listen to were poured from the one to the other through their eyes. She spoke hurriedly, breathlessly.

“I want you to know that if we enter the war, and you’re sent over there, I’ll find a way to go too.”

He began some kind of protest, but she silenced him.

“I know how I could do it. There’s a woman in Paris who’d take me on to work with her. You see, I’m used to Europe. You’re not. I can’t bear to think of you—with no family—so far away from everyone—and all alone. I’ll go.”

Before he could seize anything like the full import of what she was telling him she had slipped away again. Guy was still playing, martially and majestically.

Tom sat wrapt in a sudden amazed tranquillity. Now that she had told him, told him more, far more, than was in her words, he was not surprised; he was only reassured. He realized that it was what he had expected. He had not expected it in the mind, nor precisely with the heart. If the heart has reasons which the reason doesn’t know, it was something beyond even these. The nearest he could come to it, now that he tried to express it by the processes of thought, was that between him and her there existed a community of life which they had only to take for granted. She was taking it for granted. To find out if she loved him he would never have to ask her; she would never have to ask him. *They knew!* He

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wondered if the knowledge brought to her the peace it brought to him. He felt that he knew that too.

Having ended his polonaise, Guy let his fingers run restlessly up and down the keys. He had not turned round; he had heard nothing; he hadn't guessed that Hildred had come and gone. That was their secret. They would keep it as a secret. One of them at least had no wish to make it known.

He had no wish that it should go farther, even between him and her, till the future had so shaped itself that he could be justified. That it should remain as it was, unspoken but understood, would for a long, long time to come be joy and peace for them both.

Suddenly Guy broke into a strain enraptured and exultant. It flung itself up on the air as easily as a bird's note. It was lyric gladness, welling from a heart that couldn't tire.

Caught by his own jubilation, Guy took up the melody in a tenor growing liquid and strong after the years of cracked girliness.

"Guy, for heaven's sake, what's that?"

The singer cut into his song long enough to call back over his shoulder:

"Schumann! 'To the Beloved'!"

He began singing again, his head thrown back, his big body swaying. All the longing for love of a fellow on the edge of twenty, but for him made shamefaced by his fat, found voice in that joyousness.

Tom had not supposed that in the whole round of the universe there was such expression for his nameless ecstasies. It was not Guy whom he heard, nor

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the piano; it was the morning stars singing together; it was the sons of God shouting for joy; it was all the larks and all the thrushes and all the nightingales that in all the ages had ever trilled to the sun and moon.

“Don’t stop,” he shouted, when the song had mounted to its close. “Let’s have it all over again.”

So they had it all over again, the one in his wordless, mumbled tenor, and the other singing in his heart.

XL

DURING the next week or ten days Tom worried over Tad Whitelaw. He wondered whether or not he ought to go to see the boy. If he didn't, Tad's Harvard career might end suddenly. If he did, he would probably have humiliation for his pains. He wouldn't mind the humiliation if he could do any good; but would he?

One thing that he could do was to take himself to task for thinking about the fellow in one way or the other. It was the fight he put up from day to day. What was Tad Whitelaw to him? Nothing! And yet he was much. It was beyond reasoning about.

He was a responsibility, a care. Tom couldn't help caring; he couldn't help feeling responsible. If Tad went to the bad something in himself would have gone to the bad. He might argue against this instinct every minute of the day, yet he couldn't argue it down.

He remembered that Tad went often to see Hildred. He had been on his way to see her that afternoon before Christmas when they had met on the esplanade. She might be able to get at him more easily than anybody else. He rang her up.

Her life as a *débutante* was so crowded that she found it hard to give him a half hour. "I'm dead beat," she confessed on the wire. "If it weren't for

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mother I'd call it all off." She made him a suggestion. She was driving that morning to lunch with a girl who lived in one of the big places beyond Jamaica Pond. If he could be at a certain corner she could pick him up. He could drive out with her, and come back by the trolley car. Then they could talk. That this proposal didn't meet the wishes of some one near the telephone he could judge by the aside which also passed over the wire. "He wants to see me about Tad, mother. I can't possibly refuse."

Getting into the car beside her, he had another of those impressions, now beginning to be rare, of the difference between her way of living and all that he was used to. Much as he knew about cars, it was the first time he had actually driven in a rich woman's limousine. The ease of motion, the cushioned softness, the beaver rug, the blue-book, the little feminine appointments, the sprig of artificial flowers, subdued him so that he once more found it hard to believe that she took him on a footing of equality.

But she did. Her indifference to the details which overpowered him was part of the wonder of the privilege. Having everything to bestow, she seemed unaware of bestowing anything. She took for granted their community of life. She did it simply and without self-consciousness. Had they been brother and sister she could not have been easier or more matter-of-course in all that she assumed.

Except for the coming-out ball it was the first time, too, that he had seen her as what he called "dressed up." Her costume now was a warm brown velvet of a shade which toned in with the gold-brown of her

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eyes and the nut-brown of her complexion. She wore long slender jade earrings, with a string of jade beads visible beneath her loosened furs. The furs themselves might have been sables, though he was too inexperienced to give them a name. Except for the jade, she wore, as far as he could see, nothing else that was green but a twist of green velvet forming the edge of her brown velvet toque. Her neat proud head lent itself to toques as being simple and distinguished.

He himself was self-conscious and shy. He could hardly remember for what purpose she had been willing to pick him up. A queen to her subjects is always a queen, a little overwhelming by her presence, no matter how human her personality. Now that he was before her in his old Harvard clothes, and the marks of the common world all over him, he could hardly believe, he could *not* believe, that she had uttered the words she had used on Sunday night.

All the ease of manner was on her side. She went straight to the point, competent, businesslike.

“The thing, it seems to me, that will possibly save Tad is that he’s got to keep himself fit in case war breaks out.”

That was her main suggestion. Tad couldn’t afford to throw himself away when his country might, within a few weeks, have urgent need of him. He couldn’t, by over indulgence let himself run down physically, as he couldn’t by neglecting his work put himself mentally at a disadvantage. He must be fit. She liked the word—fit for his business as a soldier.

“That’s just what would appeal to him when

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nothing else might," Tom commended. "I wish you'd take it up with him."

"I will; but you must too."

"If I get a chance; but I daresay I shan't get one."

She had a way of asking a leading question without emphasis. Any emphasis it got it drew from the long oblique regard which gave her the air of a woman with more experience than was possible to her years.

"Why do you care?"

He had to hedge. "Oh, I don't know. He's just a fellow. I don't want to see him turn out a rotter."

"If he turned out a rotter would you care more than if it was anybody else?"

"M-m-m! Perhaps so! I wouldn't swear to it."

"I would. I know you'd care more. And I know why."

He tried to turn this with a laugh. "You can't know more about me than I do myself."

"Oh, can't I? If I didn't know more about you than you do yourself . . ."

He decided to come to close quarters. "You mean that you do think I'm the lost Whitelaw baby?"

"I know you are."

"How do you know?"

"Miss Nash told me so, for one thing."

"And for another?"

"For another, I just know it."

"On what grounds?"

"On no grounds; on all grounds. I don't care anything about the grounds. A woman doesn't have to have grounds—when she knows."

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“Well, what about my grounds when I know to the contrary?”

“But you don’t. You only know your history back to a certain point.”

“I’ve only *told* you my history back to a certain point. I know it farther back than that.”

“How far back?”

“As far back as anyone can go, from his own knowledge.”

“Oh, from his own knowledge! But some of the most important things come before you can have any knowledge. You’ve got to take them on trust.”

“Well, I take them on trust.”

“From whom?”

“From my mother.”

She was surprised. “You remember your mother?”

“Very clearly.”

“I didn’t know that. What do you remember about her?”

“I remember a good many things—how she looked—the way she talked—the things she did.”

“What sort of things were they?”

“That’s what I want to tell you about. It’s what I think you ought to know.”

She allowed her eyes to rest on his calmly. “If you think knowing would make any difference to me—”

“I think it might. It’s what I want to find out.”

“Then I can tell you now that it wouldn’t.”

“Oh, but you haven’t heard.”

“I don’t want to hear, unless you’d rather—”

“That you did. That’s just what I do. I don’t think we can go any farther—I mean with our—”

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the word was difficult to find—"I mean with our—friendship—unless you do hear."

"Oh, very well! I want you to do what's easiest for you, and if it does make a difference I'll tell you honestly."

"Thank you." For a second, not more, he laid his hand on her muff, the nearest he had ever come to touching her. "We were talking about the things my mother did. Well, they weren't good things. The only excuse for her was that she did them for me, because she was fond of me."

"And you were fond of her?"

"Very; I'm fond of her still. It's one of the reasons—but I must tell you the whole story."

He told as much of the story as he thought she needed to know. Beginning with the stealing of the book from which he had learned to read, he touched only the points essential to bringing him to the Christmas Eve which saw the end; but he touched on enough.

"Oh, you poor darling little boy! My heart aches for you—all the way back from now."

"So you see why I became a State ward. There was nothing else to do with me. I hadn't anybody."

"Of course you hadn't anybody if . . ."

"If my mother stole me. But you see she didn't. I was her son. I don't want to be anybody else's."

"Only—" she smiled faintly—"you can't always choose whose son you want to be."

"I can choose whose son I don't want to be. That's as far as I go."

"Oh, but still—" She dismissed what she was

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going to say so as not to drive him to decisions. "At any rate we know what to do about Tad, don't we? And you must work as well as I."

"I will if he gives me a look-in, but very likely he won't."

And yet he got his look-in, or began to get it, no later than that very afternoon.

He had gone to Westmorley Court to give Guy a hand with some work he was doing for his mid-years. On coming out again, a little scene before the main door induced him to hang back amid the shadows of the hall.

Thorne Carstairs was there with his machine, a touring car that had seen service. In spite of his residence in Tuxedo Park, and what Guy had called his stacks of dough, he was a seedy, weedy youth, with the marks of the cheap sport. Tad was there also, insisting on being taken somewhere in the car. Spit Castle being on the spot as a witness to a refusal accompanied by epithets of primitive significance, Tad waxed into a rage. Even to Tom, who knew nothing of the cause of the breach, it was clear that a breach there was. Tad sprang to the step of the car. Thorne Carstairs pushed him off, and made spurts at driving away. Before he could swing the wheel, Tad was on him like a cat. Curses and maulings were exchanged without actual blows, when a shove from Carstairs sent Tad sprawling backward. Before he could recover himself to rush the car again its owner had got off.

There was a roar of laughter from Spit, as well as some hoots from spectators who had viewed the

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scuffle from their windows. Tad's self-esteem was hurt. Not only had his intimate friend refused to do what he wanted, but he was being laughed at by a good part of Westmorley Court.

He turned to Spit, his face purple. "By God, I'll make that piker pay for this before the afternoon's out."

Hatless as he was, without waiting for comment, he started off on the run. Where he was running nobody knew, and Tom least of all. By the time he had reached the street Tad was nowhere to be seen.

For the rest of the day the incident had no sequel. Tom had almost dismissed it from his mind, when on the next day, while crossing the Yard, he ran into Guy Ansley.

Guy was brimming over. "Heard the row, haven't you?"

Tom admitted that he had not. Guy gave him the version he had heard, which proved to be the correct one. He gave it between fits of laughter and that kind of sympathetic clapping on the back which can never be withheld from the harum-scarum dare-devil playing his maddest prank.

When Tad had run from the door of Westmorley Court he had run to the police station. There he had laid a charge against an unknown car-thief of running off with his machine. He could be caught by telephoning the traffic cops on the long street leading from Cambridge to Boston. He gave the number of the car which was registered in the State of New York. His own name, he said, was Thorne Carstairs; his residence, Tuxedo Park; his address

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in Boston, the Hotel Shawmut, where he was known and could be found. Having lodged this complaint, and put all the forces of the law into operation, he had dodged back to Westmorley Court, had his dinner sent in from a restaurant, locked his door against all comers, and turned into bed.

In the morning, according to Guy, there had been the devil to pay. As far as Tad was concerned, the statement was literally true. Thorne Carstairs had been locked in the station all night. Not only had he been caught red-handed with a stolen car, but his lack of the license he had neglected to carry on his person, as well as of registration papers of any kind, confirmed the belief in the theft. His look of a cheap sport, together with his tendency to use elementary epithets, had also told against him. Where another young fellow in his plight might have won some sympathy he roused resentment by his howlings and his oaths.

"We know you," he was assured. "Been on the look-out for you this spell back. You're the guy what pinched Dr. Pritchard's car last week, and him with a dyin' woman. Just fit the description—slab-sided, cock-eyed, twisted-nosed fella we was told to look for, and now we've got our claw on you. Sure your father's a gentleman! Sure you live at the Hotel Shawmut! But a few months in a hotel of another sort'll give you a pleasant change."

In the morning Thorne had been brought before the magistrate, where two officials of the Shawmut had identified him as their guest. Piece by piece, to everyone's dismay, the fact leaked out that the law

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of the land, the zeal of the police, and the dignity of the court had been hoaxed. Thorne himself gave the clue to the culprit who had so outraged authority, and Tad was paying the devil. Guy didn't know what precisely had happened, or if anything definite had happened as yet at all; he was only sure that poor Tad was getting it where the chicken got the ax. He deserved it, true; and yet, hang it all! only a genuine sport could have pulled off anything so audacious.

With this Tom agreed. There were spots in Guy's narrative over which he laughed heartily. He condemned Tad chiefly for going too far. It was his weakness that he didn't know when he had had enough of a good thing. Anyone in his senses might know that to hoax a policeman was a crime. A policeman's great asset was the respect inspired by his uniform. Under his uniform he was a man like any other, with the same frailties, the same sneaking sympathy with sinners; but dress him up in a blue suit with brass buttons on his breast, and you had a figure to awe you. If you weren't awed the fault was yours. Yours, too, must be the penalty. The saving element was that beneath the brass buttons the heart was kindly, as a rule, and humorous, patient, generous. Tom had never got over the belief, which dated from the night when his mother was arrested, of the goodness of policemen. He trusted to it now.

He was not long in making up his mind. Leaving Guy, he cut a lecture to go to see the Dean. He went to the Dean's own house, finding him at home. The Dean remembered him as one of two or three young

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fellows who in the previous year had adjusted a bit of friction between the freshmen and the faculty without calling on the higher authorities to impose their will. He was cordial, therefore, in his welcome.

He was a big, broad-shouldered Dean, human and comprehending, with a twinkle of humor behind his round glasses. There was no severity in the tone in which he discussed Tad's escapade; there was only reason and justice. Tad had given him a great deal of trouble in the eighteen months in which he had been at Harvard. He had written to his father more than once about the boy, had advised his being given less money to spend, and a stricter calling to account at home. The father was distressed, had done what he could, but the mischief had gone too far. Tad was the typical rich man's son, spoiled by too easy a time. He had been so much considered that he never considered anybody else. He was swaggering and conscienceless. The Dean was of the opinion now that nothing but harsh treatment would do him any good.

Tom put in his plea. The matter, as he saw it, was bigger than one fellow's destiny; it involved bigger issues. It was his belief that the country would soon be at war. If the country was at war, Tad White-law's father would be one of the first of the bankers the President would consult. The Dean knew, of course, that the bankers would have to swing as much of the war as the army and navy. Henry T. White-law was a man, as everyone knew, already terribly tried by domestic tragedy. You wouldn't want to add to that now, just at the time when he needed to have

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a mind as free as possible. This boy was the apple of his eye; and if disgrace overtook him . . .

But that was only one thing. Should the country go to war, it would call for just such young fellows as Tad Whitelaw; fellows of spirit, of daring, of physical health and strength. Didn't the Dean think that it might be well to nurse him along for a few weeks—it wasn't likely to be many—so that he could answer to the country's call with at least a nominal honorable record, instead of being under a cloud? If the Dean did think so, he, Tom, would undertake to keep the fellow straight till he was wanted. He wasn't vicious; he was only foolish and headstrong. Though he didn't make a good student, he had in him the very stuff to make a soldier. Tom would answer for him. He would be his surety.

In the long run the Dean allowed himself to be won by Tom's own earnestness. He would do what he could. At the same time Tom must remember that if the college authorities stayed their hand the civil authorities might not. The indignation at police headquarters was unusually bitter. Unless this righteous wrath were pacified . . .

Having thanked the Dean, Tom ran straight to the police station. The Chief of Police received him, though not with the Dean's cordiality. He too was a big, broad-shouldered man, but frigid and stern through long administration of law, discipline, and order. He impressed Tom as a mechanical contrivance which operates as it is built to operate, and with no power of showing mercy or making exceptions to a rule. Outwardly at least he was grave and obdurate.

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The victory lay once more with Tom's earnestness. The Chief of Police made no secret of the fact that they were already considering the grounds on which "the crazy fool" could most effectively be prosecuted. The law was not, however, wholly without a heart, and if in the present instance the country could be served, even in the smallest detail, by giving the blamed idiot the benefit of clemency it could be done. Tom must understand that the nonsense had not been overlooked; it was only left in abeyance. If his protégé got into trouble again he would be the more severely dealt with because of the present lenity.

Tom ran now to Westmorley Court, where he knocked at Tad's door. To a growling invitation he went in. The room was a cloud of tobacco smoke, through which the shapes of half a dozen fellows loomed dimly in the deepening winter twilight. Tad tilted back in the revolving chair before the belittered desk which held the center of the room. His coat was off, his waistcoat unbuttoned, his feet on the edge of the desk. A cigar traveled back and forth from corner to corner of the handsome, disdainful mouth.

Tom marched straight to the desk, speaking hurriedly. "Can I have a word with you in private?"

The owner of the room neither moved nor took the cigar from his lips. "No, you can't." He nodded toward the door. "You can sprint it out again."

"I shall sprint it out when I'm ready. If I can't speak in private I shall speak in public. You've got to hear."

The insolent immobility was maintained. "Didn't

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I tell you the last time I saw you that if you ever interfered with me again—?”

“That you’d shoot me, yes. Well, get up and shoot. If you can’t, or if you don’t mean to, why make the threat? But I’ve come to talk reason. You’ve got to listen to reason. If you don’t I’ll appeal to these chaps to make you. They don’t want to see you a comic valentine any more than I do. Now climb down from your high horse and let’s get to business.”

It was Guy Ansley who cleared the room. “Say, fellows—” With a stealthy movement, which their host was too preoccupied to observe, they slipped out. He knew, however, when he and his enemy were alone, and still without lifting his feet from the desk or taking the cigar from his mouth, made the concession of speaking.

“Well, if business has brought you here, cough it up.”

“I will. I come first from the Dean, and then from the Chief of Police.”

“Oh, you do, do you? So you’re to be the hangman.”

“No; there’s not to be a hangman. They’ve given you a reprieve—because I’ve begged you off.”

The feet came off the desk. The cigar was taken from the lips. Tad leaned forward in his chair, tense and incredulous.

“You’ve done—*what?*”

Tom maintained his sang-froid. “I’ve begged you off. I went and talked to them both. I said I’d answer for you, that you’d stop being a crazy loon, and try to be a man.”

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Incredulity passed into angry amazement. "And who in hell gave you authority to do that?"

"Nobody. I did it on my own. When a fellow gets his life as a gift he takes it. He doesn't kick up a row as to who's given it. For the Lord's sake, try to have a little sense."

"What's it to you whether I've got sense or not?"

"Nothing."

"Then why in thunder do you keep butting in—?"

"Because I choose to. I'll give you no other answer than that, and no other explanation. What you've got to do is to knuckle under and show that you're worth your keep. You're not a *born* fool; you're only a made fool. You're good for something better than to be a laughing-stock as you are to everyone in college. Buck up! Be a fellow! After being a jackass for a year and a half, I should think you'd begin to see that there was nothing to it by this time."

Never in his life had Tad Whitelaw been so hammered without gloves. It was why Tom chose to hammer him. Nothing but thrashing, verbal or otherwise, would startle him out of the conviction of his self-importance. Already it was shaking the foundations of his arrogance. In his tone as he retorted there was more than a hint of feebleness.

"What I see and what I don't see is my own affair."

"Oh, no, it isn't. It's a class affair. There's such a thing as *esprit de corps*. We can't afford to have rotters, now especially."

Tad grew still feebler. "I'm not the only rotter in the bunch. Why do you pick on me?"

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"I've told you already. Because I choose to. You might as well give in to me first as last, because you'll not get rid of me any more than you will of your own conscience."

Tad sprang to his feet, his eyes flashing, in a new outburst. "I'll be damned if I'll give in to you."

"And I'll be damned if you don't. If I can't bring you round by persuasion I'll do it as I did it once before. I'll wale the guts out of you. I'm not going to have you a disgrace."

"Ah!" Tad started back. "Now I've got you. A disgrace! You talk as if you were a member of the family. That's what you're after. That's what you've been scheming for ever since—"

"Look here," Tom interrupted, forcefully. "Let's understand each other about this business once and for all." Looking from under his eyelids he measured Tad up and down. "I wouldn't be a member of the family that has produced *you* for anything the world could give me."

Tad bounded, changing his note foolishly. "Oh, you wouldn't wouldn't you! How do you know that you won't damn well have to be?"

Walking up to him, Tom laid a hand on his shoulder, paternally. "Don't let us talk rot. We both know the nickname the fellows have stuck on me in Harvard. But what's that to us? You don't want me. I don't want you. At least I don't want you that way. I'll tell you straight. I've got a use for you. That's why I keep after you. But it's got nothing to do with your family affairs."

They confronted each other, Tad gasping. "You've

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got a use for me? Greatly obliged. But get this. I've no use for you. Don't make any mistake—"

Withdrawing his hand, Tom gave him a little shove. "Oh, choke it back. Piffle won't get you anywhere. I'm going to make something of you of which your father and mother can be proud."

It was almost a scream of fury. "Make something of *me*—?"

"Yes, a soldier."

The word came like a douche of cold water on hysteria, calming the boy suddenly. He tapped his forehead. "Say, are you balmy up here?"

"Possibly; but whether I'm balmy or not, a soldier is what you'll have to be. Don't you read the papers? Don't you hear people talking? Why, man alive, two or three months from now every fellow of your age and mine will be marching behind a drum."

The boy's haggard face went blank from the sheer shock of it. The idea was not brand new, but it was incredible. Tad Whitelaw was not one of those who took much interest in public affairs or kept pace with them.

"Oh, rot!"

"It isn't rot. Can't you see it for yourself? If this country pitches in—"

"Oh, but it won't."

"Ask anyone. Ask your own father. That's my point. If we do pitch in your father will be one of the big men of the two continents. You're his only son. You'll *have* to play up to him."

Tom watched the hardened, dissipated young face contract with a queer kind of gravity. The teeth

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gritted, the lips grew set. It gave him the chance to go on.

“There aren’t a half dozen men in the country who’d be able to swing what your father’ll be swinging. Lister! I know something about banking. Been studying it for years. When it comes to war the banker has to chalk-line every foot of the lot. They can’t do anything without him. They can’t have an army or a navy or any international teamwork. You’ll see. The minute war is declared, *before* war is declared, the President’ll be sending for your father to talk over ways and means. Now then, are you to put a spoke in the country’s wheel? You can. You’re doing it. The more you worry him the less good he’ll be. Get chucked out of college, as you would have been in a day or two, if I hadn’t stepped in, and begged to have you put in my charge—”

Once more Tad revolted. “Put in your charge! The devil I’ll be put in your charge!”

“All right! It’s the one condition on which you stay at Harvard. Jump your bail, and you’ll see your father pay for it. He’ll have his big international job, and he won’t be able to swing it because he’ll be thinking of you. You’ll see the whole country pay for it. I daresay we shan’t know where we pay and how we pay; but we’ll be paying. Say, is it worth your while? What do you gain by being the rotten spot in the beam that may bring the whole shack about our ears? Everybody knows that your father has lost one son. Can’t you try to give him another of whom he won’t have to be ashamed?”

Tad stood sulkily, his hands in his trousers’ pockets,

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as he tipped on his toes and reflected. Since he made no answer, Tom went on with his appeal.

“And that’s not the only thing. There’s yourself. You’re not a bad sort. You’ve got the makings of a decent chap, even if you aren’t one. You could be one easily enough. All you’ve got to do is to drop some of your fool acquaintances, cut out drinking, cut out women, and make a show of doing what you’ve been sent to Harvard to do, even if it’s only a show. You won’t have to keep it up for more than a few weeks.”

The furrow in the forehead when the eyebrows were lifted was also a mark of dissipation. “More than a few weeks? Why not?”

Tom pounded with emphasis. “Because, I tell you, we’ll be in the war. *You’ll* be in the war. We fellows of the class of 1919 are not going to walk up on Commencement Day and take our degrees. We’ll get them before that. We’ll get them in batteries and trenches and graves. I heard a girl say, in speaking of you a day or two ago, that she hoped, when the time came for that, you’d be fit. She said she liked the word—fit for the job that’d be given you. You couldn’t be fit if you went on—”

His curiosity was touched. “Who was that?”

“I’m not going to tell you. I’ll only say that she likes you, and that—”

“Was it Hildred Ansley?”

“Well, if you’re bound to know, it was. If you want to talk to someone who wishes you well, go and—”

“Did she put you up to this?”

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"No, she didn't. You put me up to it yourself. I tell you again, I'm going to see you go straight till I see you go straight into the army. You ought to go in with a commission. But if you're fired out of Harvard they'll be shy of enlisting you as a private. If you won't play the game of your own accord, I'll make you."

With hands thrust into his trousers' pockets, Tad began to pace the room, doing a kind of goose-step. His compressed lips made little grimaces like those of a man forcing himself to decisions hard to swallow. For a good four or five minutes Tom watched the struggle between his top-loftiness and his common-sense. While common-sense insisted on his climbing down, top-loftiness told him that he must save his face. When he spoke at last his voice was hoarse, his throat constricted.

"If it's going to be war I'll be in it with both feet. But I'll do it on my own. See? You mind your business, and I'll mind mine."

Tom was reasonable. "That'll be all right—if you mind it."

"And if you think I'm giving in to you—"

"I don't care a hang whether you're giving in to me or not so long as you—*keep fit.*"

"I'll be the judge of that."

"And I'll help you."

"You can go to hell."

Tad used these words because he had no others. They were fine free manly words which begged all the questions and helped him to a little dignity. If he was surrendering he would do it, in his own phrase,

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with bells on. The mucker shouldn't have the satisfaction of thinking he had done anything. It saved the whole situation to tell him in this offhand way the place that he could go to.

But a little thing betrayed him, possibly before he saw its significance. His points being won for the minute, Tom had reached the door. Beside the door stood a low bookcase, on which was open a package of cigarettes. Tad's goose-step brought him within reach of it. He picked it up and held it toward Tom. He did it carelessly, ungraciously, unthinkingly, and yet with all sorts of buried implications in the little act.

"Have one?"

Tom was careful to preserve a casual, negligent air as he drew one out. Tad struck a match.

As the one held the thing to his lips and the other put the flame to it, the hands of the brothers, for the first time except in a fight, touched lightly.

XLI

I CAN'T see," Hildred reasoned, "why you should find the idea so terrible."

"And I can't see," Tom returned, "what it matters how I find the idea, so long as nobody is serious about it."

"Oh, but they will be. It's what I told you before. They'd made up their minds they didn't want to find him; and now it's hard to unmake them again. But they're coming to it."

"I hope they're not taking the trouble on my account."

"They're taking it on their own. Tad as much as said so. He said they'd stuck it out as long as they could; but they couldn't stick it out forever."

"Stick it out against what?"

"Against what's staring them in the face, I suppose."

"Did he tell you what I said to him, that nothing would induce me to belong to the family that had produced him?"

She laughed. "Oh, yes. He told me the whole thing, how you'd come into his room, how Guy had got the other fellows out, and the pitched battle between you."

"And did he say how it had ended?"

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“He said—if you want to know exactly I’ll tell you exactly—he said that when it came to talking about the war and the part he would have to play in it, you weren’t as big a damn fool as he had thought you.”

“And did he say how big a damn fool he was himself?”

“He admitted he had been one; but with his father on his hands, and the war, and all that, he’d have to put the brakes on himself, and pretend to be a good boy.”

Laughing to himself Tom stretched out his legs to the blaze of the fire. Hildred had sent for him because Mrs. Ansley was out of the way at her Mothers’ Club. There was nothing underhand in this, since she would not conceal the fact accomplished. It avoided only a preliminary struggle. If she needed an excuse, the necessities of their good intentions toward Tad would offer it.

Tea being over, Hildred, who was fond of embroidery, had taken up a piece of work. Like many women, she found it easier to be daring in an incidental way while stitching. Stitching kept her from having to look at Tom as she reverted to the phase of the subject from which they had drifted away.

“The Whitelaws are a perfectly honorable family. They may even be called distinguished. I don’t see what it is you’ve got against them.”

“I’ve got nothing against them. They rather—” he sought for a word that would express the queer primordial attraction they possessed for him—“they rather cast a spell on me. But I don’t want to belong to them.”

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“But why not, if it was proved that—?”

“For one reason, it couldn't be proved; and for another, it's too late.”

The ring in his voice was strange; it made her look up at him. “Too late? Why do you say that?”

“Because it is. You told me some time ago that it was what they thought themselves. Even if it *were* proved, it would still be—too late.”

“I don't understand you.”

“I'm not sure that I understand myself. I only know that the life I've lived would make it impossible for me to go and live their life.”

“Oh, nonsense! Their life is just the same as our life.”

“Well, I'm not sure that I could live yours. I could conform to it on the outside. I could talk your way and eat your way; but I couldn't think your way.”

“When you say *my* way—”

“I mean the way of all your class. Mind you, I'm not against it. I only feel that somehow—in things I can't explain and wouldn't know how to remedy—it's wrong.”

“Oh, but, Tom—”

“It seems to be necessary that a great many people shall go without anything in order that a very few people may enjoy everything. That's as far as I go. I don't draw any conclusions; and I'm certainly not going in for any radical theories. Only I can't think it right. I want to be a banker; but even if I *am* a banker—”

“I see what you mean,” she interrupted, pensively. “I often feel that way myself. But, oh, Tom, what

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can we do about it that—that wouldn't seem quite mad?"

He smiled ruefully. "I don't know. But if you live long enough—and work hard enough—and think straight enough—and don't do anything to put you off your nut—why, some day you may find a way out that will be sane."

"Yes, but couldn't you do that and be Harry Whitelaw—if you *are* Harry Whitelaw—at the same time?"

"Suppose we wait till the question arises? As far as I know, no one who belonged to Harry Whitelaw, or to whom Harry Whitelaw belonged, has ever brought it up."

But only a few weeks later this very thing seemed about to come to pass.

It was toward the end of March. On returning to his room one morning Tom was startled by a telegram. Telegrams were so rare in his life that merely to see one lying on his table gave him a thrill, partly of wonder, partly of fear. Opening it, he was still more surprised to find it from Philip Ansley. Would Tom be in Louisburg Square for reasons of importance at four that afternoon?

That something had betrayed himself and Hildred would have been his only surmise; only that there was nothing to betray. Except for the few hurried words Hildred had spoken on that Sunday night, anything they had said they had said in looks, and even their looks had been guarded and discreet. The things most essential to them both were in what they were taking for granted. They had exchanged no letters; their intercourse was always of the kind that anyone

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might overhear. Without recourse to explanation each recognized the fact that it would be years before either of them would be free to speak or to take a step. In the meantime their only crime was their confidence in each other; and you couldn't betray that.

Nevertheless, it was with uneasiness that he rang at the door, and asked Pilcher if Mr. Ansley were at home. Pilcher was mysterious. Mr. Ansley was not at home, but if Mr. Tom would come in he would find himself expected. Tea being served in the library, Mr. Tom was shown upstairs.

It was a gloomy afternoon outside; the room was dim. All Tom saw at first was a tall man standing on the hearth rug, where the fire behind him had almost gone out. He had taken a step forward and held out his hand before Tom recognized the distinguished stranger who had first hailed him in the New Hampshire lake nearly three years earlier.

"Do you remember me?"

"Yes, sir."

They stood with hands clasped, each gazing into the other's face. Tom would have withdrawn his hand, would have receded, but the other held him with a grasp both tense and tenacious. The eyes, deep-set like Tom's own, and overhung with bushy outstanding eyebrows, studied him with eager penetration. Not till that look was satisfied did the tall figure swing to someone who was sitting in the shadow.

"This is the boy, Onora. Look at him."

She was sitting out of direct range in a corner of the library darkened by buildings standing higher on the Hill. The man turned Tom slightly in her direc-

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tion, where the daylight fell on him. The degree to which the woman shrank from seeing him was further marked by the fact that she partly hid her face behind a big black-feather fan for which there was no other use than concealment. She said nothing at all; but even in the obscurity Tom could perceive the light of two feverish eyes.

It was the man who took the lead.

“Won’t you sit down?”

He placed a chair where the woman could observe its occupant, without being drawn of necessity into anything that might be said. The man himself drew up another chair, on which he sat sidewise in an easy posture close to Tom. Tom liked him. He liked his face, his voice, his manner, the something friendly and sympathetic he recalled from the earlier meetings. Whether this were his father or not, he would have no difficulty in meeting him at any time on intimate and confidential terms.

“My wife and I wanted to see you,” he began, simply, “in order to thank you for what you’ve done for Tad.”

Tom was embarrassed. “Oh, that wasn’t anything. I just happened—”

“The Dean has told me all about it. He says that Tad has given him no trouble since. Before that he’d given a good deal. I wish I could tell you how grateful we are, especially as things are turning out, with a war hanging over us.”

Tom saw an opportunity of speaking without sentiment. “That’s what I thought. It seemed to me a

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pity that good fighting stuff should be lost just through—through too much skylarking.”

“Yes, it would have been. Tad *has* good fighting stuff.”

There was a catch of the woman's breath. Tom recalled the staccato nervousness of their first brief meeting in Gore Hall. He wished they hadn't brought him there. They were strangers to him; he was a stranger to them. Whatever link might have been between him and them in the past, there was no link now. It would be a mistake to try to forge one.

But in on this thought the man broke gently.

“I wonder if you'd mind telling us all about yourself that you know? I presume that you understand why I'm asking you.”

“Yes, sir, I do; but I don't think I can help you much.”

The woman's voice, vibrating and tragic, startled him. It was as if she were speaking to herself, as if something were being wrung from her in spite of her efforts to keep it back. “The likeness is extraordinary!”

Taking no notice of this, the man began to question him, “Where were you born?”

“In the Bronx.”

He made a note of this answer in a little notebook.

“And when?”

“In 1897.”

“What date?”

It was the crucial question, but since he meant to tell everything he knew, Tom had no choice but to be exact.

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"I'm not very sure of the date, because my mother changed it at three different times. At first my birthday used to be on the fifth of March; but afterward she said that that had been the birthday of a little half-sister of mine who died before I was born."

"What was her name?"

"Grace Coburn."

"And her parents' names?"

"Thomas and Lucy Coburn."

"And after your birthday was changed from the fifth of March—?"

"It was shifted to September, but not for very long. Later my mother told me I was born on the tenth of May, and we always kept to that."

From the woman there was something like a smothered cry, but the man only took his notes.

"The tenth of May, 1897. Did she ever tell you why she selected that date?"

"No, sir."

"Did she ever say anything about it, about what kind of day it was, or anything at all that you can remember?"

Tom hesitated. The reflection that the wisest course was to make a clean breast of everything impelled him to go on.

"She only said that it was a day when all the nursemaids had had their babies in the Park, and the lilacs were in bloom."

There followed the question of which he was most afraid, because he often put it to himself.

"Why should she have said that, when, if you were

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born in the Bronx, she and her baby were miles away?"

"I don't know, sir."

"What was your mother's maiden name?"

"I don't know, sir."

"She was married to Thomas Coburn before she was married to Theodore Whitelaw, your father?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where were she and your father married?"

"I don't know, sir."

"What *do* you know about your father?"

"Nothing at all. I never heard his name till she gave it at the police station, the night before she died."

"Oh, at the police station! Why there?"

Tom told the whole story, keeping nothing back.

The man's only comment was to say, "And you never heard the name of Whitelaw in connection with yourself till you heard it on that evening?"

"Yes, sir, I'd heard it before that."

"When and how?"

"Always when my mother was in a—in a state of nerves. You mustn't forget that she wasn't exactly in her right mind. That was the excuse for what she—she did in shops. So, once in so often, she'd say that I was never to think that my name was Whitelaw, or that she'd stolen me."

There was again from the woman a little moaning gasp, but the man was outwardly self-possessed.

"So she said that?"

"Yes, sir."

"And have you any explanation why?"

"I didn't have then; I've worked one out. You see,

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my name really being Whitelaw, and her mind a little unbalanced, she was afraid she might be suspected of—your little boy's case had got so much publicity—and she a friendless woman, with no husband or relations—”

“So that you don't think she did—steal you?”

He answered firmly. “No, sir. I don't.”

“Why don't you?”

“For one thing, I don't want to.”

“Oh!”

It was the woman again. The sound was rather queer. You could not have told whether it meant relief or indignation.

The man's sad penetrating eyes were bent on him sympathetically. “When you say that you don't want to, exactly what do you mean?”

“I'm not sure that I can say. She was my mother. She was good to me. I was fond of her. I never knew any other mother. I don't think I could—” he looked over at the woman in the shadow, letting his words fall with a certain significant spacing—“know—any other—mother—now—and so—”

Rising, she took a step toward him. He too rose so that as she stood looking up at him he stood looking down at her. There and then her face was imprinted on his memory, a face of suffering, but of suffering that had not made her strong. The quivering victim of self-pity, she begged to be allowed to forget. She had suffered to her limit. She couldn't suffer any more. Everything in her that was raked with the harrow protested against this bringing up again of an outlived agony.

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Her beautiful eyes, brimming with unspilled tears, gazed at him reproachfully. As plainly as eyes could tell him anything, they told him that now, when life and time had dug between them such a gulf, she didn't want him as her son. She might have to accept him, since so many things pointed that way, but it would be hard for her. Taking back a little boy would have been one thing; taking back a grown man, none of whose habits or traditions were the same as theirs, would be another. She would do it if it were forced on her, but it couldn't recompense her now for past unhappiness. It would be only a new torture, a torture which, if he hadn't drifted in among them, she might have escaped.

When swiftly and silently she had left the room the man put his hand on Tom's arm.

"Sit down again. You mustn't think that my wife doesn't feel all this. She does. It's because she does that she's so overwrought."

Tom sat down. "Yes, sir, of course!"

"She's been through it so often. For a good ten years after our child was lost boys used to be brought to us to look at every few months. And every time it meant a draining of her vitality."

"I understand that, sir; and I hope Mrs. Whitelaw doesn't think I've come of my own accord."

"No, she knows you haven't. We've asked you to come because—but I must go back. When my wife had been through so much—so many times—and all to no purpose—she made me promise—the doctors made me promise—that she shouldn't be called on to face it

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again. Whenever she had to interview one of these claimants—”

“*I’m* not a claimant,” Tom put in, hastily.

“I know you’re not. That’s just it. It’s what makes the difference. But whenever she had to do it—and decide whether a particular lad was or was not her son—it nearly killed her.”

Tom made an inarticulate murmur of sympathy.

“The worst times came after we’d turned down some boy of whom we hadn’t been quite sure. That was as hard for me as it was for her—the fear that our little fellow had come back, and we’d sent him away. It got to be so impossible to judge. You imagined resemblances even when there were none, and any child who could speak could be drilled about the facts, as we were so well known. It was hell.”

“It must have been.”

“Then there were our two other children. It wasn’t easy for them. They grew up in an atmosphere of expecting the older brother to come back. At first it gave them a bit of excitement. But as they grew older they resented it. You can understand that. A stranger wouldn’t have been welcome. Whenever a new clue had to be abandoned they were glad. If the boy had been found they’d have given him an awful time. That was another worry to my wife.”

“Yes, it would be.”

“So at last we made up our minds that he was dead. It was the only thing to do. Self-protection required it. My wife took up her social life again, the life she’s fond of and is fitted for. Things went better.

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She didn't forget, but she grew more normal. In spite of the past there were a few things she could still enjoy. She'd begun to feel safe; and then—in that lake in New Hampshire—I happened to see you.”

“If I were you, sir, I shouldn't let that disturb me.”

“It does disturb me. When I went back that year to our house at Old Westbury and spoke to my wife and children about it, they all implored me not to go into the thing again.”

“If I could implore you, too—”

He shook his head. “It wouldn't do any good. I've come to the point where I've got to see it through. I have all the data you've given me—as well as some other things. If you're not—not my son—” He rose striding to the fireplace, where he stood pensively, his back to the smouldering fire—“if you're not my son, at least we can find out pretty certainly whose son you are.”

Tom also rose, so that they stood face to face. “And if you can't find out pretty certainly whose son I am—?”

“I shall be driven to the conclusion that—”

He didn't finish this sentence. Tom didn't press for it. During the silence that followed it occurred to him that if there was a war the question might be shelved. It was what, he thought, he would work for.

The same idea might have come to the older man, for looking up out of his reverie, he said, with no context:

“What do you mean to be?”

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“I’ve always hoped, sir, to go into a bank. It’s what I seem best fitted for.”

There came into the eyes that same sudden light, like the switching on of electricity, which Tom remembered from their meeting in the water.

“I could help you there.”

“Oh, but it would only be in a small way, sir. I’d have to begin as something—”

“All the same I could help you. I want you to promise me this, that when you’re free—either after Harvard, or after the war—you’ll come to me before you do anything else. Is that a bargain?”

To Tom it was the easiest way out. “Yes sir, if you like.”

“Then our hands on it!”

Their right hands clasped. Once more Tom found himself held. The man’s left hand came up and rested on his shoulder. The eyes searched him, searched him hungrily, with longing. Whether they found what they sought or merely gave up seeking Tom could hardly tell. He was only pushed away with a little weary gesture, while the tall man turned once more toward the dying fire.

XLII

IN the April of 1920, nearly eighteen months after the signing of the Armistice, Tom Whitelaw came back to Boston, demobilized. He had crossed a good part of Europe almost in a straight line—Brest, Paris, Château-Thierry, Belleau Wood, Fère-en-Tardennois, Reims, Luxembourg, Coblenz—and more or less in the same way had come back again. Now, if he had been able to forget it all, he would gladly have forgotten it. Since it couldn't be forgotten it inspired him with an aim in life.

More exactly, perhaps, it made definite the aim he had been vaguely conscious of already. What he felt was not new; it was only more fixed and clear. He knew what he meant to do, even though he didn't see how he was to do it. He might never accomplish anything; very likely he never would; but at least he had a state of mind, and he was not going to be in a hurry. If for the ills he saw he was to work out a cure, or help to work out a cure, or even dream of working out a cure, he must first diagnose the disease; and diagnosis would take a good part of his lifetime. He was twenty-three, according to his count, but, again according to his count he had the seriousness of forty. With the advantage of a varied experience and an early maturity, he had also that of age.

His achievements in the war had given him the kind of importance interesting to newspapers. They

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had begun writing him up from the days of the action at Belleau Wood. His picture had appeared in their Sunday editions as on the staff of General Pershing during his visit to the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg. To Tom himself the only satisfaction in this was the possible diminishing of the distance between him and Hildred Ansley. It would not have been the first time in history when war had helped a lover out of his obscurity to put him on the level of the loved one. To Hildred herself it would make no difference; but by her father and mother, especially by her mother, a son-in-law who had worn with some credit his country's uniform might be pardoned his presumption.

Public approval also brought him one other consideration that meant much to him. The man who thought he might be his father wrote to him. He wrote to him often. He wrote to him partly as a friend might write, partly as a father might write to his son. Between the lines it was not difficult to read a yearning and sense of comfort. The yearning was plainly for assurance; just as plainly the sense of comfort lay in the knowledge that somewhere in the world there was a heart that beat to the measure of his own. It was as if he had written the words: "My two acknowledged children are of no help to me; my wife is crushed by her sorrow; you and I, even if there is no drop of common blood between us, understand each other. Whether or not we are father and son, we could work together as if we were."

The letters were full of a fatherly affection strange in view of the slight degree of their acquaintanceship.

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The man's heart cleared that obstacle with a bound. Tom's heart cleared it with an equal ease. To be needed was the call to which, with his strong infusion of the feminine, he never failed to answer instantaneously. As readily as the banker divined him, he divined the banker. If there was no fatherhood or sonship in fact there was both sonship and fatherhood in essence.

Whitelaw wrote as if he had been writing to his boy for years, with a matter-of-course solicitude, with offers of money, with scraps of news. He talked freely of the family, as if Tom would care to hear of them. A few words in one of his letters showed that he knew more than Tom had hitherto supposed.

"If Tad and Lily have been uncivil to you it was not because of personal dislike. In their situation some hostility toward the outsider, as they would call him, whom they might be forced to acknowledge as their older brother must be forgiven as not unnatural."

During all the three years of Tom's soldiering this was the only reference to the question that had been left suspended by the war. Whether or not it would ever be taken up again Tom had no idea. He hoped it would not be. For him an undetermined situation was enough.

Though during this period Henry Whitelaw was frequently in London and Paris they never met. When the one proposed that he should use his influence to get the other leave, Tom thought it wiser to stay, as he expressed it, on the job. Only once did he ask permission to run up for forty-eight hours to Paris, and that was to see Hildred.

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She was then helping to nurse Guy, who, while working with the Y.M.C.A., had come down with typhoid fever. Convalescent by this time, he would sail for America in a month or two, Hildred going with him. Tom himself being on the eve of marching into Germany, the moment was one to be seized.

They dined in a little restaurant near the Madeleine. With the table between them they scanned each other's faces for the traces left by nearly two years of separation. Except that she was tired Tom found little change in her. Always lacking in temporary, girlish prettiness, her distinction of line and poise was that which the years affect but slowly, and experience enhances. He could only say of her that she was less the young girl he had last seen in Boston, and more the woman of the world who, having seen the things that happen as they happen most brutally, has grown a little heartsick, and more than a little weary.

"It's all so futile, Tom. It's such waste. It should never have been asked of the people of the world."

His lips had the dim disillusioned smile which had taken the place of the radiance of even a year or two earlier.

"What about the war to end war? What about making the world safe for democracy?"

She put up a hand in protest. "Oh, don't! I hate that clap-trap. The salt which was good enough to put on birds' tails is sickening when you see the poor creatures lying with their necks wrung. Oh, Tom, what can we do about it if we ever get home?"

"Do about what?"

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“About the whole thing, about this poor pitiful, pitiable human race that’s got itself into such an awful mess?”

“The human race is a pretty big problem to handle.”

“Yes, but you don’t think the bigness ought to stop us, do you?”

“Stop us from—?”

“From trying to keep the world from going on with its frightful policy of destruction. Isn’t there anyone to show us that you can’t destroy one without by that much destroying all; that you can’t make it easier for one without by that much making it easier for everyone? Are we never going to be anything but fools?”

His dim smile came and went again. “We’ll talk about that when I get home. We can’t do it now. Even if we could it’s no us trying to reason with a world that’s gone insane. We must let it have time to recover. I want to hear about you.”

She threw herself back in her chair, nervously crumbling a bit of bread. “Oh, I’m all right. Never better, as far as that goes. I’ve only grown an awful coward. Now that the fighting’s over I seem to be more afraid than when it was going on. As far as pep goes I’m a rag.”

“It’ll do you good to get home.”

“Oh, I want to get farther away than home. I want to get somewhere—to a desert island perhaps—where there won’t be any people—”

“None?”

“Oh, well, dad and mother and Guy and—”

“And nobody else?”

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“Yes, and you. I see you want me to say it, so I might as well. I want you there—and *then* nobody else—not a soul—not the shadow of a soul—except servants, of course—”

He grew daring as he had never been before. “Perhaps before many years we may find that island—with the servants all the time—but with your father and mother and Guy as visitors—very frequent visitors—but—”

“Oh, don’t talk about it. It’s too heavenly for a world like this.” She looked him in the eyes, despairingly. “Do you suppose it *ever* could come true?”

“Stranger things have.”

“But better things haven’t.”

He put down his knife and fork to gaze at her. “Hildred, do you really feel like that?”

“Well, don’t you?” Her tone was a little indignant. “If you don’t for pity’s sake tell me, so that I shan’t go on giving myself away.”

“Of course, I feel that way, only it seems to me queer that you should.”

“Why queer?”

“Because you’re you, and I’m only me.”

“You can’t reason in that way. You can’t really reason about the thing at all. The most freakish thing in the world is whom people’ll fall in love with.”

“It must be,” he said humbly.

“Oh, cheer up; it isn’t as bad as all that. There’s no disgrace in my being in love with you. If you’ll just be in love with me I’ll take care of myself.”

They laughed like children. To neither was it strange to have taken their love for granted, since

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they had done it for so long. It was as if it had grown with them, as if it had been born with them. Its flowers had opened because it was their spring-time; there was nothing else for it to do. It was a stormy springtime, with only the rarest bursts of sunshine; but for that very reason they must make the most of such sunshine as there was. They had not met for two years; it might be two years more before they met again. They could only throw their hearts wide open.

She talked of her work. In her mood of reaction it seemed to her now a stupid, foolish work, not because it hadn't done good, but because it had done good for such useless purposes. A New York woman whom she knew, whose son had been killed fighting with the British in the earlier part of the war, had opened a sort of club for the cheering up of young fellows passing through Paris, or there for a short leave.

"We bucked them up so that they'd be willing to go back again, and be blown to bits. It was like giving the good breakfast and the cigarette to the man going out to the electric chair. My God, what a nerve we had, we girls! We'd laugh and dance with those poor young chaps, who a few days later would be in their graves, if the shells left anything to bury. We didn't think much about it then. It's only now that it comes over me. I feel as if I'd been their executioner."

"You're tired. You need a rest."

"Rest won't reconcile me to belonging to a race of wild beasts. Oh, Tom, couldn't we make a little life

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for ourselves away from everyone, and from all this cheap vindictiveness? I shouldn't care how humble or obscure it was."

He laughed, quietly. "There are a good many hurdles to take before we come even to the humble and obscure."

"Hurdles? What kind of hurdles?"

"Your father and mother for one."

She admitted the importance of this. "But you won't find that hurdle hard to take if you're Harry Whitelaw."

"But if I'm not?"

"I'm sure from what mother writes that you can be."

"And I'm sure from what I feel that I can't."

"Oh, but you haven't tried." She hurried on from this to give him the gist of her mother's letters on the subject. "She and Mr. Whitelaw have the most tremendous confabs about you, every time he comes to Boston. The fact that he can't talk to Mrs. Whitelaw—she's all nerves the minute you're mentioned—throws him back on mother. That flatters the dear old lady like anything. She begins to think now she adopted you in infancy. You were her discovery. She gave you your first leg-up. And after all, you know, we've got to admit that during the whole of these seven years she might have been a great deal worse."

He agreed with her gratefully.

"As a matter of fact," she went on, in her judicial tone, "you must hand it to us Boston people that, while we can be the most awful snobs, we're not such

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snobs that we don't know a good thing when we see it. It's only the second-cut among us, those who don't really *belong*, who are supercilious. Once you concede that we're as superior as we think ourselves, we can be pretty generous. If you've got it in you to climb up we not only won't kick you down, but we'll put out our hands and pull you. That's Boston; that's dad and mother. When you've made all the fun of them you like, the poor dears still have that much left which you can't take away from them."

Something of this Tom was to test by the time he and Hildred met again. It was not another two years before they did that, but it was a year. Demobilized in Washington, he traveled straight to Boston. He had made his plans. Before seeing Hildred again he would see her father. "It's the only straight thing to do," he told himself. After all the years in which they had been good to him he couldn't begin again to go in and out of their house while they were ignorant of what he hoped for. Hildred might have told them something; he didn't know; but the details of most importance were those which only he himself could give them.

Having written for a very private appointment, Ansley had told him to come to his office immediately on his arrival in Boston. He reached that city by half-past three; he was at the office by a little after four.

It was a large office, covering most of a floor of an imposing office building. On a glass door were the names of the partners, that of Philip Ansley standing first on the list and in bigger letters than the rest. In

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the anteroom an impersonal young lady reading a magazine said, by telephone, "Mr. Whitelaw to see Mr. Ansley."

The business of the day was over. As Tom passed through a corridor from which most of the private offices opened he saw that they were empty. The only one still occupied was at the most distant end, and there he found Philip Ansley. He found also his wife. The purpose of Tom's visit having been made clear by letter, both of Hildred's parents were concerned in it.

They welcomed him cordially, making the comments permissible to old friends on his improved personal appearance. They asked for his news; they gave their own. Guy was back at Harvard at the Law School; Hildred was at home, somewhat at loose ends. Like most girls who had worked in France, she found a life of leisure tedious.

"Eating her head off," Ansley complained. "Can't settle down again."

Mrs. Ansley was more heroic. "We accept it. It's part of what we offered up to the Great Cause. We gave our all, and though all was not taken from us we should not have murmured if it had been."

Taking advantage of this turn of the talk, Tom launched into his appeal. For the last time in his life, as he hoped, he told the story of his mother. As he had told it to Hildred and to Henry Whitelaw so now he gave it to Philip and Sunshine Ansley. Hating the task, he was upheld in carrying it through by the knowledge that everyone who had a right to know it knew it now.

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He finished with the minute at which Guy first spoke to him. From that point onward they had been able to follow the course of his life for themselves. They had in a measure entered into it, and helped him to his opportunities. He thanked them; but before he could accept their goodwill again he wanted them to know exactly what he had sprung from. Hildred did know. She had known it for several years. It had made no difference to her; he hoped so to make good in the future that it would make no difference to them.

They listened attentively, with no sign of being shocked. Now and then, at such points as the stealing of the first little book, or the final arrest, one or the other would murmur a "Dear me!" but sympathy and pity were plainly their sentiments. They didn't condemn him; they didn't even blame him. He had been an unfortunate child. There was nothing to be thought of him but that.

After he had finished there was a silence that seemed long. Ansley sat at his desk, leaning back in his revolving chair. Mrs. Ansley was near a window, where she could to some extent shield herself by looking out. She left to her husband the duty of speaking the first word.

"It all depends, my dear fellow, on your being accepted by Henry Whitelaw as his son."

There was another silence. "Is that final, sir?"

"I'm afraid it is."

"Is there no way by which I can be taken as myself?"

Mrs. Ansley turned from her contemplation of the

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Lion and the Unicorn on the Old State House. "No one is ever taken as himself. We all have to be taken with the circumstances that surround us."

Ansley enlarged on this, leaning forward and toying with a paperweight. "My wife is quite right. Nobody in the world is just a human being pure and simple. He's a human being plus the conditions which go to make him up. You can't separate the conditions from the man, nor the man from the conditions. If you're Henry Whitelaw's son, stolen and brought up in circumstances no matter how poor and criminal, you're one person; if you're the son of this—this woman, whom I shan't condemn any more than I can help, you're another. You see that, don't you?"

"Can't I be—what I've made myself?"

"You can't make yourself anything but what you've been from the beginning. You can correct and improve and modify; but you can't change."

"So that if I'm the son of—of this woman, you wouldn't want me. Is that it?"

"How could we?" came from Mrs. Ansley. "But I know from Mr. Whitelaw himself that—"

Ansley smiled, paternally. "Suppose we leave it there. After all, the last word rests with him."

"I don't think so, sir. It rests with me."

This could be dismissed as of no importance. "Oh, with you, of course, in a certain sense. They can't force you. But if they're satisfied that you're—"

"And if I'm not satisfied?"

"Oh, but, my dear fellow, you wouldn't make yourself difficult on that score."

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“It’s not a question of being difficult; it’s one of what I can do.”

They got no farther than that. Tom’s reluctance to deny the woman he had always regarded as his mother was not only hard for them to seize, it was hard for him to explain. He couldn’t make them see that the creature who for them was only a common shoplifter was for him the source of tender and sacred memories. To accuse her of a greater crime than theft would be to desecrate the shrine which he himself had built of love and pity; but he was unable to put it into words, as they were unable to understand it. He himself worded it as plainly as he could when, rising, he said:

“So that I must renounce my mother or renounce Hildred.”

Ansley also rose. “That’s not quite the way to express it. If she *was* your mother, there can be no question of your renouncing her. But then, too, there can be no question of—of Hildred. I’m sure you must see.”

“And if I see, would Hildred also see?”

Leaving her window, Mrs. Ansley, bulbous and quivering, lilted forward. “We must leave that to your sense of honor. In a way we’re in your hands. It’s within your power to make us suffer.”

“I should never do that,” he assured her, hastily. “Hildred wouldn’t want me to. After all you’ve done for me neither she nor I—”

“Quite so, my dear fellow, quite so.” Ansley held out his hand. “We trust you both. But the situation is clear, I think. If you come back to us as Harry

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Whitelaw, you'll find us eager to welcome you. If you don't, or if you can't—"

A wave of the hand, a shrug of the shoulders, expressing the rest, Tom could only bow himself out.

XLIII

ON the part of Philip and Sunshine Ansley the confidence was such that Hildred was permitted to take a walk with Tom before his departure for New York.

“We’re not engaged,” Hildred reported as part of her mother’s conditions, “and we can’t be engaged unless you’re proved to be Harry Whitelaw. Mother thinks you’re going to be. So apparently the question in the long run will be as to whether or not you want me.”

“It won’t be that. I’m crazy about you, Hildred, more than any fellow ever was before.”

“And that’s the way I feel about you, Tom. I don’t care a bit about the things dad and mother think so important. You’re you; you’re not your father or your mother, whoever they may have been. I shouldn’t love you any the better if you became the son of Mr. and Mrs. Whitelaw. It would only make it easier.”

It was a windy afternoon in April, with the trees in new leaf. All along the Fenway the bridal-veil made cascades of whiteness whiter than the hawthorns. Pansies, tulips, and forget-me-nots brightened all the foot-paths. The two tall, supple figures bent and laughed in the teeth of the lusty wind.

Rather it was she who laughed, since she had the confidence in life, while he knew only life’s problems.

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He had always known life's problems, and though there had never been a time when he was free from them, he never had had one to solve so difficult as this.

"But that's where the shoe pinches," he declared, "that I'm myself, so much more myself than many fellows are; and yet, unless I turn into some one else, I shall lose you."

She threw back her answer with a kind of radiant honesty. "You couldn't lose me, Tom. I couldn't lose you. We've grown together. Nothing can cut us asunder. One can't win out against two people who're as willing to wait as we are."

He was not comforted. "Oh, wait! I don't want to wait."

"Neither do I; but we'd both rather wait than give each other up."

"Wait—for how long?"

"How can I tell how long? As long as we have to."

"Till your father and mother die?"

"Oh, gracious, no! I'm not killing the poor lambs. Till they come round. They'll *come* round."

"How do you know?"

"Because fathers and mothers always do. Once they see how sad I'll be—"

"Oh, you're going to play that game."

She was indignant. "I shan't play a game. I shall *be* sad. I'm all right now while you're here; but once you're gone—well, if dad and mother want a martyr on their hands they'll have one. I shan't be putting it on either. I'll not be able to help myself."

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"I'd rather they came around for some other reason than to save your life."

"I'm not particular about the reason so long as they come round. But you see I'm talking as if the worse were coming to the worst. As a matter of fact, I believe the better is coming to the best."

"Which means that you think the Whitelaws . . ."

"I know they will."

"And that I . . ."

"Oh, Tom, you'll be reasonable, won't you?"

He was silent. Even Hildred couldn't see what his past had meant to him. A wretched, miserable past from some points of view, at least it was his own. It had entered into him and made him. It was as hard to take it now as a hideous mistake as it would have been to take his breathing or the circulation of his blood.

The farther it drifted behind him the more content he was to have known it. Each phase had given him something he recognized as an asset. Honey, the Quidmores, the Tollivants, Mrs. Crewdson, the "mudda," had all left behind them experiences which time was beginning to consecrate. Hildred couldn't understand any more than anybody else what it cost him to disclaim them. He often wondered whether, had he been born the son of Henry and Eleonora Whitelaw, and never been stolen away from them, he would have grown to be another Tad. He thought it very likely.

Not that Tad hadn't justified himself. He had. His record in the war had gone far to redeem him. He had come through with sacrifice and honor. Hav-

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ing fought without a scratch for a year and a half, he had, on the very morning of the day when the Armistice was signed, received a wound which, because of the infection in his blood, had resulted in the loss of his right arm. This maiming, which the chance of a few hours would have saved him, he took, according to Hildred, with splendid pluck, though also with an inclination to be peevish. Lily, so Tom's letters from Henry Whitelaw had long ago informed him, had married a man named Greenshields, had had a baby, had been divorced, and again lived at home with her parents.

Tom pondered on the advantages they, Tad and Lily, were assumed to have enjoyed and which he himself had been denied. Everyone, Hildred included, took it for granted that ease and indulgence were blessings, and that he had suffered from the loss of them. Perhaps he had; but he hadn't suffered more than Tad and Lily on whom they had been lavished. Tad with his maimed body, Lily with her maimed life, were not of necessity the product of wealth and luxury; but neither did a blasted soul or character come of necessity from poverty and hardship, or even from an origin in crime.

He couldn't explain this to Hildred, partly because she didn't care, partly because he had not the words, and mostly because her assumptions were those of her society. She would love him just the same whether he were the son of a woman who had killed herself in jail, or that of a banker known throughout the world; but the advantages of being the latter were

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to her beyond argument. So they were to him, except that . . .

Thus with Hildred he came to no conclusions any more than with her parents. With her as with them it was an object to keep him from making any statement that might seem too decisive. If they left it to Henry Whitelaw and himself the scales could but dip in one direction.

And yet when actually face to face with the banker, Tom doubted if the subject was going to be raised. He had written, reminding Whitelaw of the promise he himself had exacted, that on looking for work, Tom should apply first of all to him. Like Ansley, the banker had made an appointment at his office.

The office was in the ponderous and somewhat forbidding structure which bore the name of Meek and Brokenshire in Wall Street. The room into which Tom was shown was shabby and unpretentious. Square, low-ceiled, lighted by two windows looking into yards or courts, its one bit of color lay in the green and red of a Turkey rug, threadbare in spots, and scuffed into wrinkles. Against the walls were heavily carved walnut bookcases, housing books of reference. A few worn leather armchairs made a rough circle about a wide flat-topped desk, which stood in the center of the room. On the desk were some valuable knickknacks, paper weights, paper cutters, pen trays, and other odds and ends, evidently gifts. A white-marble mantelpiece clumsily sculptured in the style of 1840 was adorned above by the lithographed head of the first J. Howard Brokenshire, also of 1840, and one of the founders of the firm.

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For the first few minutes the room was empty. Tom stood timidly close to the door through which he had come in. The banker entered from a room adjoining.

“Ah, here you are!”

He crossed the floor rapidly. For a long minute Tom found himself held as he had been held before, the man's right hand grasping his, the left hand resting on his shoulder. There was also the same searching with the eyes, and the same little weary push when the eyes had searched enough.

“Sit down.”

Tom took the armchair nearest him; the man drew up another. He drew it close, with hungry eagerness. Tom was apologetic.

“I must beg your pardon, sir, for asking you to see me—”

“Oh, no, my dear boy. I should have been hurt if you hadn't. I've been expecting you ever since I read that you'd landed. What made you go to Boston before coming here?”

There was confession in Tom's smile. “I had to see some one.”

“Was it Hildred Ansley?”

Tom found himself coloring, and without an answer.

“Oh, you needn't tell me. I didn't mean to embarrass you. The Ansleys are very good friends of mine. Known them well for years. If it hadn't been for them you and I might never have got together. Now give me some account of yourself. It

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must be nearly two months since I last heard from you."

Tom gave such scraps of information as he hadn't told in letters, and thought might be of interest. With some use of inner force he nerved himself to ask after Mrs. Whitelaw, and "the other members of the family," a phrase which evaded the use of names.

The banker talked more freely than he had written. He talked as to one with whom he could open his heart, and not as to an outsider. Mrs. Whitelaw was stronger and calmer, less subject to the paralyzing terrors which had beset her for so long. Tad was doing with himself the best he could, but the best in the case of a fellow of his age and tastes who had lost his right arm was not very good. He could ride a little, guiding his horse with his left hand, but he couldn't drive a car, or hunt, or play polo, or use his hand for writing. He could hardly dress himself; he fed himself only when everything was cut up for him. In the course of time he would probably do better, but as yet he couldn't do much. Lily had made a mess of things. It was worse than what he had told Tom in his letters. She had eloped with a worthless fellow, whom he, her father, had forbidden her to know, and who wanted nothing but her money. It was a sad affair, and had stunned or bewildered her. He didn't like to talk of it, but Tom would see for himself.

He reverted to Tom's own concerns. "You wrote to me about a job."

"Yes, sir; but I'm afraid it's bothering you too much."

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“Don’t think that. I’ve got the job.”

The young man tried to speak, but the other hurried on.

“I hope you’ll take it, because I’ve been keeping it for you ever since I saw you last.”

Tom’s eyes opened wide. “Over three years?”

“Oh, there was no hurry. Easy enough to save it. I want you to be one of the assistants to my own confidential secretary. This will keep you close to myself, which is where I want to have you for the first year at least. You’ll get the hang of a lot of things there, and anything you don’t understand I can explain to you. Later, if you want to go into the study of banking more scientifically—well, I shall be able to direct you.”

He sat dazzled, speechless. It was the future!—Hildred!—happiness!—honor!—the big life!—the conquest of the world! He could have them all by sitting still, by saying nothing, by letting it be implied that he renounced his loyalties, by being passive in the hand of this goodwill. He would be a fool, he told himself, not to yield to it. Everyone in his senses would consider him a fool. The father of the Whitelaw baby believed that he had found his child. Why not let him believe it? How did he, Tom Whitelaw, know that he wasn’t his child? The woman who had told him he was never to think so was dead and in her grave. Judged by all reasonable standards, he owed her nothing but a training in wicked ways. He would give her up. He would admit, tacitly anyhow, even if not in words, that she

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had stolen him. He would be grateful to this man—and profit by his mistake.

He began to speak. “I hardly know how to thank you, sir, for so much kindness. I only hope—” He was trying to find the words in which to express his ambition to prove worthy of this trust, but he found himself saying something else— “I only hope that you’re not doing all this for me because you think I’m—I’m your son.”

Leaning toward him, the banker put his hand on his knee. “Suppose we don’t bring that up just yet? Suppose we just—go on? As a matter of fact—I’m talking to you quite frankly—more frankly than I could speak to anyone else in the world—but as a matter of fact I—I want some one who’ll—who’ll be like a son to me—whether he’s my son or not. I wonder if you’re old enough to understand.”

“I think I am, sir.”

“I’m rather a lonely man. I’ve got great cares, great responsibilities. I can swing them all right. There are my partners, fine fellows all of them; there are as many friends as I can ask for. But I’ve nobody who comes—who comes very close to me—as a son could come. I’ve thought—I’ve thought it for some time past—that—whatever you are—you might do that.”

As he leaned with his hand on Tom’s knee his eyes were lower than Tom’s own. Tom looked down into them. It was strange to him that this man who held so much of the world in his grasp should be speaking to him almost pleadingly. His memories filed by him with the speed and distinctness of lightning. He

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was the little boy moving from tenement to tenement; he was in the big shop on that Christmas Eve; he was walking with his mother in front of the policeman; he was watching her go away with the woman who was like a Fate; he was staring at the Christmas Tree; he was being pelted on his first day at school; he was picking strawberries for the Quidmores; he was sleeping in the same room with Honey; he was acting as chauffeur at the inn-club in Dublin, New Hampshire, and picking up this very man at Keene. And here they were together, the instinct of the father calling to the son, while the instinct of the son was scarcely, if at all, articulate.

The struggle was between his future and his past. "I must be his son," he cried to himself. But another voice cried, "And yet I can't be." Aloud he said, modestly, "I'm not sure, sir, that I could fill the bill for you."

"That would be up to me. It isn't what you can do but what I'm looking for that matters in a case like this." He stood up. "I'm sorry I must go back to a conference inside, but I shall see you soon again. What's your address in New York?"

Tom gave him the name of the hotel at which he was putting up. Whitelaw had never heard of it.

"Can't you do better than that?"

"Oh, it isn't bad, sir. I'm not used to luxury, and I manage very well. I'm quite all right."

"Is it money?"

"Only in the sense that everything is money. I've a little saved—not much—and I like to keep on the weather side of it. The man who did more for me

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than anybody else—the ex-burglar I told you about—always taught me to be economical.”

“All the same I don’t like to have you staying in a place like that. You must let me—”

“Oh, no, sir! I’d a great deal rather not.” He spoke in some alarm. “I’ve got to be on my own. I *must* be.”

“Oh, very well!”

The tone was not precisely cold; it was that of a man whose good intentions were sensitive. Tom did something which he never had supposed he would have dared to do. He went up to this man, and laid his hand gently on his arm. Instantly the man’s free hand was laid on the one which touched him, welcoming the caress. Tom tried to explain himself.

“It isn’t that I’m not grateful, sir. I hope you don’t think that. But—but I’m myself, you see. I’ve got to stand on my own feet. I know how to do it. I’ve learned. I—I hope you don’t mind.”

“I want you to do whatever you think best yourself. You’re the only judge.” They had separated now, and the banker held out his hand. “Oh, and by the way,” he continued, clinging to Tom’s hand in the way he had done on earlier occasions. “My wife wants to see you. She told me to ask you if you couldn’t go and lunch with her to-morrow.”

Since there was no escape Tom could only brace himself.

“Very well, sir. It’s kind of Mrs. Whitelaw. I’ll go with pleasure. At one o’clock?”

“At one o’clock.” He picked up a card from the desk. “This is our address. You’ll find Mrs. White-

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law less—less emotional than when you saw her last and more—more used to the idea.”

Without explaining the idea to which she was more used, the banker released Tom's hand with his customary little push, as if he had had enough of him, hurrying out by the door through which he had come in.

XLIV

BEFORE turning into bed that night Tom had fought to a finish his battle with himself. The victory rested, he hoped, with common sense. He could no longer doubt that before very long an extraordinary offer would be made to him. To repulse it would be insane.

“As far as my personal preferences go,” he wrote to Hildred, “I would rather remain as I am. Remaining as I am would be easier. I’m free; I’ve no one to consider; I know my own way of life, and can follow it pretty surely. But I’m not adaptable. You yourself must often have noticed that my mind works stiffly, and that I find it hard to see the other fellow’s point of view. I’m narrow, solitary, concentrated, and self-willed. But as long as I’ve no one to consult I can get along.

“To enter a family of which I know nothing of the ways or traditions or points of view is going to be a tough job. It will be much tougher than if I merely married into it. In that case I should be only an adjunct to it, whereas in what may happen now I shall have to become an integral part of it. I must be as a leg instead of as a crutch. I don’t know how I shall manage it.

“I’m not easily intimate with anyone. Perhaps that’s the reason why, as you say, I haven’t enough

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of the lover in me. I'm not naturally a lover. I'm not naturally a friend. I'm a solitary. A solitude *à deux*, with the servants, as you always like to stipulate, is my conception of an earthly paradise.

"To you the normal of life is a father, a mother, a brother, a sister. To me it isn't. To have a father seems abnormal to me, or to have a sister or a brother. If I can see myself with a mother it's because of a poignant experience of the kind that burns itself into the memory. But I can't see myself with *another* mother, and that's what I've got to do. Mind you, it isn't a stepmother I must see, nor an adopted mother, nor a mother-in-law; it's a real mother of my own flesh and blood. I must see a real brother, a real sister. They think that all they have to do is to fling their doors open, and that it will be a simple thing for me to walk in. But I must fling open something more tightly sealed than any door ever was—my life, my affections, my point of view. They are four, and need only make room for one. I'm only one, and must make room for four.

"But I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it for a number of reasons which I shall try to give you in their order.

"First, for your sake. You want it. For me that is enough. I see your reasons too. It will help us with your father and mother, and all our future life. So that settles that.

"Then, I want to conform to what those who care anything about me would expect. I don't want to seem a fool. It's what I should seem if I turned such an offer down. Nobody would understand my

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emotional and sentimental reasons but myself; and when it comes to the emotional and sentimental there is a pro side as well as a con to the whole situation.

“Because if I *must* have a father there’s no one whom I could so easily accept as a father as this very man. He seems to me like my father; I think I seem to him like his son. More than that, he looks like my father, and I must look like the kind of son he would naturally have. I’m sure he likes me, and I know I like him. If I was choosing a father he’s the very one I should pick out.

“Next, and you may be surprised to hear me say it, I could do very well with Tad as a brother. That he couldn’t do with me is another thing; but there’s something about the chap which has bewitched me from the day I first laid eyes on him. I haven’t liked him exactly; I’ve only felt for him a kind of responsibility. I’ve tried to ignore it, to laugh at it, to argue it down; but the thing wouldn’t let me kill it. If there’s such a thing as an instinct between those of the same flesh and blood I should say that this was it. I’ve no doubt that if we come to living in one menagerie we shall be the same sort of friends as a lion and a tiger—but there it is.

“The women appall me. I can’t express it otherwise. With the father I could be a son as affectionate as if I’d never left the family. With Tad I could establish—I’ve established already—a sort of fighting fraternity. To neither the mother nor the daughter could I ever be anything, so far as I can see now. They wouldn’t let me. They wouldn’t want me. If they yield to the extent of admitting me into the

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family they'll always bar me from their hearts. The limit of my hope is that, since I generally get along with those I have to live with, the hostility won't be too obvious. I also have the prospect that when you and I are married—and that's my motive in the whole business—I shall get a measure of release."

He purchased next morning a pair of gloves and an inexpensive walking stick so as to look as nearly as might be like the smart young men he saw on the pavements of Fifth Avenue. It was not his object to be smart; it was to be up to the standard of the house at which he was to lunch.

To reach that house he went on the top of a bus like the one on which he had ridden with Honey nearly ten years earlier. He did this with intention, to make the commemoration. Honey's suspicions and predictions had then seemed absurd; and here they were on the eve of being verified.

He got off at the corner at which, as he remembered, Honey and he had got off on that August Sunday afternoon. He crossed the road to see if he could recognize the home of the Whitelaw baby as it had been pointed out to him. Recognition came easily enough because in the whole line of buildings it was the only one which stood detached, with a bit of lawn on all sides of it. A spacious brownstone house, it had the cheery, homey aspect which comes from generous proportions, and masses of spring flowers, daffodils, tulips, and hyacinths, banked in the bow-windows.

Being a little ahead of his time, he walked up the street, trying to compose himself and recapture his

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nerve. The story, first told to him by Honey, and repeated in scraps by many others, returned to him. Too far away to be noticed by anyone who chanced to be looking out, he stood and gazed back at the house. If he was really Harry Whitelaw he had been born there. The last time he had come forth from it he had been carried down those steps by two footmen. He had been wheeled across the street and into the Park by a nurse in uniform. Within the glades of the Park a change had somehow been wrought in his destiny, after which there was a blank. He emerged from that blank into consciousness sitting on a high chair in a kitchen, beating on the table with a spoon, and asking the question: "Mudda, id my name Gracie, or id it Tom?" The memory was both vague and vivid. It was vague because it came out from nowhere and vanished into nowhere. It was vivid because it linked up with that bewilderment as to his identity which haunted his early childhood. The discovery that he was a little boy forced on a woman craving for a little girl was the one with which he first became aware of himself as a living entity.

To his present renunciation of that woman he tried to shut his mind. There was no help for it. He had long kept a veil before this sad holy of holies; he would simply hang it up again. He would nail it up, he would never loosen it, and still less go behind it. What was there would now forever be hidden from any sight, even from his own.

At a minute before one he recrossed the avenue, and went down the little slope. In the rôle of Harry Whitelaw which he was trying to assume going up the

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steps was significant. The long, devious, apparently senseless odyssey had brought him back again. It was only to himself that the odyssey seemed straight and with a purpose.

The middle-aged man who opened the door raised his eyebrows and opened his eyes wide in a flash of perturbation. It was only for an instant; in the half of a second he was once more the proper stiffened image of decorum. And yet as he took from the visitor the hat, stick, and gloves, Tom could see that the eyes were scanning his face furtively.

It was a big dim hall, impressive with a few bits of ancient massive furniture, and a stairway in an alcove, partially hidden by a screen which might have been torn from some French cathedral. Tom, who had risen to the modest standard of the Ansleys, again felt his insufficiency.

Following the butler, he went down the length of the hall toward a door on the right. But a door on the left opened stealthily, and stealthily a little figure darted forth.

“So you’ve come! I knew you would! I knew I shouldn’t go down to my grave without seeing you back in the home from which twenty-three years ago you were carried out. I’ve said so to Dadd times without number, haven’t I, Dadd?”

“You have indeed, Miss Nash,” Dadd corroborated, “and none of us didn’t believe you.”

“Dadd was the second footman,” Miss Nash explained further. “He was one of the two who lifted you down that morning. Now he’s the butler; but he’s never had my faith.”

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She glided away again. Dadd threw open a door. Tom found himself in a large sunny room, of which the bow-window was filled with flowers.

There was no one there, which was so far a relief. It gave him time to collect himself. Except for apartments in museums, or in some château he had visited in France, he had never been in a room so stately or so full of costly beauty. He knew the beauty was costly in spite of his lack of experience.

On the wall opposite the bow-window stretched a blue-green Flemish tapestry, with sad-eyed, elongated figures crowding on one another within an intricate frame of flowers, foliage, and fruits. A white-marble mantelpiece, bearing in shallow relief three garlanded groups of dancing Cupids, supported a clock and a pair of candelabra in *biscuit de Sèvres* mounted in ormolu. Above this hung a full-length eighteenth-century lady—Reynolds, Romney, Gainsborough—he was only guessing—looking graciously down on a cabinet of European porcelains, on another of miniatures, and another of old fans. Bronzes were scattered here and there, with bits of iridescent Spanish luster, and two or three plaques of Limoges enamel intense in color. Since there was room for everything, the profusion was without excess, and not too carefully thought out. A work-basket filled with sewing materials and knitting stood on a table strewn with recent magazines and books.

He was so long alone that he was growing nervous when Lily dropped into the room as if she had happened there accidentally. She sauntered up to him,

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however, offering her hand with a long, serpentine lifting of the arm, casual and negligent.

“How-d’ye-do? Mamma’s late. I don’t know whether she’s in the house or not. Perhaps she’s forgotten. She often does.” She picked up a silver box of cigarettes. “Have one?”

On his declining she lighted one for herself, dropping into a big upright chair and crossing her legs. It was the year when young ladies liked to display their ankles and calves nearly up to the knee. Lily, whose skirt was of unrelieved black, wore violet silk stockings, with black slippers which had bright red buckles set in paste. Over her shoulders a violet scarf, with bright red bars, hung loosely. In sitting, her sinuous figure drooped a little forward, the elbow of the hand which held the cigarette supported on her knee.

Though she hadn’t asked him to sit down, he took a chair of his own accord, waiting for her to speak again. When she did so, after an interval of puffing out tiny rings of blue smoke, her voice was languid and monotonous, and yet with overtones of passionate self-will.

“You’ve been in the army, haven’t you?”

He said he had been.

“Did you like it?”

“I never had time to think as to whether I did or not. I just had to stick it out.”

“Did you ever see Tad over there?”

“No, I never did.”

As she was laconic he too would be laconic. She didn’t look at him, or show an interest in his per-

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sonality. If she thought him the brother who after long disappearance was coming home again she betrayed no hint of the possibility. He might have been a chance stranger whom she would never see again. Lapses of silence did not embarrass her. She sat and smoked.

He decided to assume the right to ask questions on his own side. "You've been married since I saw you last, haven't you?"

"Yes." She didn't resent this, apparently, and after a long two minutes of silence, added: "and divorced." There was still a noticeable passage of time before she continued, in her toneless voice: "I've a baby too."

"Do you like him?"

A flicker of a smile passed over a profile heavy-browed, handsome, and disdainful. "He's an ugly little monster so far." She had a way of stringing out her sentences as after-thoughts. "I daresay he's all right."

There followed a pause so long and deep that in it you could hear the ticking of the clock. He was determined to be as apathetic as herself. She had no air of thinking. She scarcely so much as moved. Her stillness suggested the torrid, brooding calm before volcanic or seismic convulsion. Without a turning of the head or a change in her languid intonation, she said, casually:

"You're our lost brother, aren't you?"

The emotion from which she was so free almost strangled him. He could barely breathe the words, "Would you care if I were?"

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“What would be the use of my caring if papa was satisfied?”

“Still, I should think, that one way or the other, you might care.”

To this challenge she made no response. She was not hostile in any active sense; he was sure of that. She impressed him rather as exhausted after terrific scenes of passion, waywardness, and disillusion. A little rest, and she would be ready for the same again, with himself perhaps to take the consequence.

Mrs. Whitelaw came in with the rapid step and breathless, syncopated utterance he remembered.

“So sorry to be late. I’d been for a long drive. I wanted to think. I had no idea what time it was. I suppose you must be hungry.”

She gave him her hand without looking him in the face, helped over the effort of the meeting by the phrases of excuse.

“So this is my mother!”

It was his single thought. In the attempt to realize the fact he had ceased to be troubled or embarrassed. He could only look. He could only wonder if he would ever be able to make himself believe that which he did not believe. He repeated to himself what he had already written to Hildred: he could believe the man to be his father; but that this woman was his mother he rejected as an impossibility.

Not that there was anything about her displeasing or unsympathetic. On the contrary, she had been beautiful, and still had a lovely distinction. Features that must always have been soft and appealing had gained by the pathos of her tragedy, while a skin that

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could never have been anything but delicate and exquisite was kept exquisite and delicate by massage and cosmetics. Veils protected it from the sun and air; gauntlets, easy to pull on and off, preserved the tenderness of hands wearing many jeweled rings, but a little too dimpling and pudgy. The eyes, limpid, large, and gray with the lucent gray of moonstones, had lids of the texture of white rose petals just beginning to shrivel up and show little *bistré* stains. The lashes were long, dark, and curling like those of a young girl. Tom couldn't see the color of her hair because she wore a motoring hat, with a sweeping brown veil draped over it and hanging down the back. Heather-brown, with a purplish mixture, was the Harris tweed of her coat and skirt. The blouse of a silky stuff, was brown, with blue and rose lights in it when she moved. A row of great pearls went round her neck, while the rest of the string, which was probably long, disappeared within the corsage.

Dadd appeared on the threshold, announcing lunch.

"Come on," Mrs. Whitelaw commanded, and Lily rose listlessly. "Is Tad to be at home?"

Lily dragged her frail person in the wake of her mother. "I don't know anything about him."

Tom followed Lily, since it seemed the only thing to do, crossing the hall and passing through the door by which Miss Nash had darted out to speak to him.

The dining room, on the north side of the house, was vast, sunless, and somber. Tom was vaguely aware of the gleam of rich pieces of silver, of the carving of high-backed chairs as majestic as thrones. One of these thrones Dadd drew out for Mrs. White-

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law; a footman drew out a second for Lily; another footman a third for himself.

“Sit there, will you?” Mrs. Whitelaw said, in her offhand, breathless way, as if speaking caused her pain. “This room is chilly.”

She pulled her coat about her, though the room had the temperature suited to the great plant of *Cattleya*, on which there might have been thirty blooms, which stood in the center of the table. With rapid, nervous movements she picked up a spoon and tasted the grapefruit before her. A taste, and she pushed it away, nervously, rapidly. Nervously, rapidly, she glanced at Tom, glancing off somewhere else as if the sight of him hurt her eyes.

“How long have you been back?”

He gave her the dates and places connected with his recent movements.

“Did you like it over there?”

He made the reply he had given to Lily.

“Were you ever wounded?”

He said he had once received a bad cut on the shoulder which had kept him a month in hospital, but otherwise he had not suffered.

“Tad’s lost his right arm. Did you know that?”

He had first got this news from Guy Ansley. He was very sorry. At the same time, when others had been so horribly mangled, it was something to escape with only the loss of a right arm.

She gave him another of her hurried, unwilling glances. “How did you come to know the Ansleys so well?”

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He told the story of his early meetings with the fat boy on the sidewalk of Louisburg Square.

“Wasn’t it awful living with that burglar?”

Tom smiled. “No. It seemed natural enough. He was a very kind burglar. I owe him everything.”

To Tom’s big appetite the lunch was frugal, but it was ceremonious. He was oppressed by it. That three strong men should be needed to bring them the little they had to eat and drink struck him as ridiculous. And this was his father’s house. This was what he should come to take as a matter of course. He would get up every morning to eat a breakfast served with this magnificence. He would sit every day on one of these thrones, like an apostle in the Apocalypse. He thought of breakfasts in the tenements, at the Tollivants’, at the Quidmores’, or with Honey in the grimy eating-places where they took their meals, and knew for the first time in many years a pang something like that of homesickness.

It was not altogether the ceremony against which he was rebellious. It had elements of beauty which couldn’t be decried. What he felt was the old ache on behalf of the millions of people who had to go without, in order that the few might possess so much. It was the world’s big wrong, and he didn’t know what caused it. His economic studies, taken with a view to helping him in the banking profession, had convinced him that nobody knew what caused it, and that the cures proposed were worse than the disease. Without thinking much of it actively, it was always in the back of his mind that he must work to eliminate this fundamental ill. Sitting and eating commonplace

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food in this useless solemn stateliness, the conviction forced itself home. Somewhere and somehow the world must find a means between too much and too little, or mankind would be driven to commit suicide.

During the meal, which was brief, Lily scarcely spoke. As they recrossed the hall to go back to the big sunny room, she sloped away to some other part of the house. Tom and his mother sat down together, embarrassed if not distressed.

Pointing to the box of cigarettes, she said, tersely, "Smoke, if you like."

In the hope of feeling more at ease he smoked. Still wearing her hat and coat, she drew her chair close to the fire, which had been lighted while they were at lunch, holding her hands to the blaze.

"Do you think you're our son?"

The question was shot out in the toneless voice common to Lily and herself, except that with the mother there was the staccato catch of breathlessness between the words.

Tom was on his guard. "Do you?"

Turning slightly she glanced at him, quickly glancing away. "You look as if you were."

"But looks can be an accident."

"Then there's the name."

"That doesn't prove anything."

"And my husband knows a lot of other things. He'll tell you himself what they are."

He repeated the question he had put to Lily, "Would you care if I were your son?"

Making no immediate response, she evaded the

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question when she spoke. "If you were, you'd have to make your home here."

"Couldn't I be your son—and make my home somewhere else?"

"I don't see how that would help."

"It might help me."

The large gray eyes stole round toward him. "Do you mean that you wouldn't want to live with us?"

"I mean that I'm not used to your way of living."

"Oh, well!" She dismissed this, continuing to spread her jeweled fingers to the blaze. "You said once—a long time ago—when I saw you in Boston—that you couldn't get accustomed to another—to another mother—now—or something like that. Do you remember?"

He said he remembered, but he said no more.

"Well, what about it?"

Since it was precisely to another mother that he was now making up his mind, he found the question difficult. "It was three years ago that I said that. Things change."

"What's changed?"

"Perhaps not things so much as people. I've changed myself."

"Changed toward us—toward me?"

"I've changed toward the whole question—chiefly because Mr. Whitelaw's been so kind to me."

"I don't suppose his kindness makes any difference in the facts. If you're our son you're our son whether he's kind to you or not."

"His kindness may not make any difference in the facts, but it does make a difference in my attitude."

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“Mine can’t be influenced so easily.”

Though he wondered what she meant by that he decided to find out indirectly. “No, I suppose not. After all, you’re the one to whom it’s all more vital than to anybody else.”

“Because I’m the mother? I don’t see that. They talk about mother-instinct as if it was so sure; but—” She swung round on him with sudden, unexpected flame—“but if they’d been put to as many tests as I’ve been they’d find out. Why, almost any child can seem as if he might have been the baby you haven’t seen for a few years. You forget. You lose the power either to recognize or to be sure that you don’t recognize. If anyone tries hard enough to persuade you . . .”

“Has anyone tried to persuade you—about me?”

He began to see from whence Tad and Lily had drawn the stormy elements in their natures. “Not in so many words perhaps; but when some one very close to you is convinced . . .”

“And you yourself not convinced . . .”

She rose to her feet tragically. “How *can* I be convinced? What is there to convince me? Resemblances—a name—a few records—a few guesses—a few hopes—but I don’t *know*. Who can prove a case of this kind—after nearly twenty-three years?”

In his eagerness to reassure her he stepped near to where she stood. “I hope you understand that I’m not trying to prove anything. I never began this.”

“I know you didn’t. I feel as if a false position would be as hard on you as it would be on ourselves.”

“Then you think the position would be a false one?”

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"I'm not saying so. I'm only trying to make you see how impossible it is for me to say I'm sure you're my boy—*when I don't know*. I'm not a cold-hearted woman. I'm only a tried and frightened one."

"Would it be of any help if I were to withdraw?"

"It wouldn't be of help to my husband."

"Oh, I see! We must consider him."

"I don't see that you need consider anyone but yourself. We've dragged you into this. You've a right to do exactly as you please."

"Oh, if I were to do that . . ."

"What I don't want you to do is to misjudge me. Not that it would matter whether you misjudged me or not, unless—later—we were compelled to see ourselves as—as son and mother."

"I shouldn't like to have either of us do that—under compulsion."

Restlessly, rapidly, she began to move about, touching now this object and now that. Her hands were as active as if they had an independent life. They were more expressive than her tone when they tossed themselves wildly apart, as she cried:

"What else could it be for me—but compulsion?" He was about to speak, but she stopped him. "Do me justice. Put yourself in my place. My boy would now be twenty-four. They bring me a man who looks like thirty. Yes, yes; I daresay you're not thirty, but you look like it. It's just as hard for me as if you *were* thirty. I'm only forty-four myself. They want me to think that this man—so big—so grave—so *old*—is my little boy. How *can* I? He

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may be. I don't deny that. But for me to *think* it . . . !"

He watched her as she moved from table to table, from chair to chair, her eyes on him reproachfully, her hands like things in agony.

"It's as hard for me to think it as it is for you."

The words arrested her. Her frenzied motions ceased. Only her eyes kept themselves on him, with their sorrowful, fixed stare.

"What do you mean by that?"

He tried to explain. "My only conception of a mother is of some one poor—and hard-worked—and knocked about—and loving—and driven from pillar to post—whereas you're so beautiful—and young—
young almost—and—and expensive—and—" A flip of his hand included the room—"with all this as your setting—and everything else—I can't credit it."

She came up to him excitedly. "Well, then—what?"

"The only thing we can do, it seems to me, is to try to make it easier for each other. May I ask one question?"

She nodded, mutely.

"Would you rather that your little boy was found—or that he wasn't found?"

She wheeled away, speaking only after a minute's thought, and from the other side of the room. "I'd rather that he was found—of course—if I could be sure that he *was* found."

"How would you know when you were sure?"

She tapped her heart. "I ought to know it here."

"That's the way I'd know it too."

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“And you don’t?”

In a long silence he looked at her. She looked at him. Each strove after the mystery which warps the child to the mother, the mother to the child. Where was it? What was it? How could you tell it when you saw it? And if you saw it, could you miss it and pass it by? He sought it in her eyes; she sought it in his. They sought it by all the avenues of intuitive, spiritual sight.

She tapped her heart again. Her utterance was imperious, insistent, and yet soft.

“And you *don’t*—feel it there?”

He too spoke softly. “No, I don’t.”

In reluctant dismissal he turned away from her. With her quick little gasp of a sob she turned away from him.

XLV

TO Tom Whitelaw this was the conclusion of the whole matter. A son must have a mother as well as a father. If there was no mother there was no son. The inference brought him a relief in which there were two strains of regret.

He would be farther away from Hildred. They would have more trials to meet, more bridges to cross. Very well! He was not accustomed to having things made easy. For whatever he possessed, which was not much, he had longed and worked and worked and longed till he got it. But he got it in the end. In the end he would get Hildred. Better win her so than to have her drop as a present in his arms. If not wholly content, he was sure.

In the matter of his second regret he was only sorry. It began to grow clear to him that a father needs a son more than a son needs a father. Of this kind of need he himself knew nothing. He was what he was, detached, independent, assured. He never asked for sympathy, and if he craved for love, he had learned to stifle the craving, or direct it into the one narrow channel which flowed toward Hildred. The paternal and filial instinct, having had no function in his life, seemed to have shriveled up.

But the instinct of response to the slightest movement of goodwill, to the faintest plea for help, was

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active with daily use. It leaped forth eagerly; if it couldn't leap forth something within him fretted and cried like a hound when the scent leads to earth. As Paul the Apostle, he could be all things to all men, if by any means he might help some. If Henry Whitelaw needed a son, he could be a son to him. The tie of blood was in no small measure a matter of indifference. His impulse was like Honey's "next o' kin." He remembered, as he had learned in school, that kin and kind were words with a common origin. Whitelaw's truest kinship with himself was in his kindness. His kinship with Whitelaw could as truly be in his devotion. Devotion was what he could offer most spontaneously.

If only that could satisfy the father yearning for his son! It could do it up to a point, since the banker identified kindness and kinship much as he did himself. But beyond that point there was the cry of the middle-aged man for some one who was part of himself on whom he could lean now that his strength was beginning to decline. That his two acknowledged children were nothing but a care sent him groping all the more eagerly for the son who might be a support to him. The son who was not a son might be better than no one, as he himself confessed; and yet nothing on earth could satisfy his empty soul but his own *son*. Not to be that son made Tom sorry; but without a mother, how could he be?

Otherwise, to remain as what life had made him was unalloyed relief. He was himself. In his own phrase, he was more himself than most men. But to enter the Whitelaw family, *and belong to it*, would

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turn him into some one else. He might have a right there; an accident such as happens every day might easily make him the head of it; and yet he would have to put forth affections and develop points of view which could only come from a man with another kind of past. To be the son of that mother, and the brother of that sister, sorry for them as he was, would mean the kind of metamorphosis, the change in the whole nature, of which he had read in ancient mythology. He would make the attempt if he was called to it; but he shrank from the call.

Nevertheless, he took up his job as assistant to the great man's confidential secretary. This was a Mr. Phips whom Tom didn't like, but with whom he got on easily. He easily got on with him because Mr. Phips himself made a point of it.

A rubicund, smiling man, he had to be seen twice before you gave him credit for his unctuous ability. There was in him that mingling of honesty and craft which go to make the henchman, and sometimes the ecclesiastic. While he couldn't originate anything, he could be an instrument accurate and sharp. Always ready to act boldly, it was with a boldness of which some one else must assume the responsibility. He could be the power behind the throne, but never the power sitting on it publicly. With an almost telepathic gift for reading Whitelaw's mind, he could carry out its wishes before they were expressed. From sheer induction he could, in a secondary way, direct affairs from which he never took a penny of the profits over and above his salary.

Again like the ecclesiastic and the henchman, he

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had neither will nor conscience beyond the cause he served. A born factotum, with no office but to carry out, he accepted Tom without questioning. Without questioning he set him to those duties which, as a beginner, would be within his grasp. He didn't need to be told that when a message or a document was to be sent to the most private of all offices, it should be through the person of this particular young man. Without having invented for Tom the soubriquet of the Whitelaw Baby, he didn't frown at it on hearing it pass round the office, as it did within a few days.

Tom found Whitelaw welcoming, considerate, but at first a little distant. He might have been conscious of the anomalies in the situation; he might have been anxious not to rush things; he might even have been shy. Except to ask him, toward the end of each day, how he was getting along, he didn't speak to him alone.

Then, on the fourth morning, Whitelaw sent for him. As Tom entered he was standing up, a packet in his hand.

"I want you to take a taxi and go up to my house. Ask for my wife, and give her this." He made the nature of the errand clearer. "It's the anniversary of our wedding. She thinks I've forgotten it. I've only been waiting to send this—by you."

The significance of the mission came to Tom while he was on the way. The thing in the packet, probably a jewel, was the token of a marriage of which he was the eldest born. It was to mark his position in the husband's mind that he was made the bearer of the gift. He had no opinion as to this, except that

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in the appeal to the wife there was an element of futility.

In the big dim hall he met the second born. To answer the door Dadd had left the task of helping the one-armed fellow into his spring overcoat. As Tom came in the poor left arm was struggling with the garment viciously. Tad broke into a greeting vigorous, but noncommittal.

“Hello, by Gad!”

Tom went straight to his business. “Your father has sent me with a message to Mrs. Whitelaw. I understand she’s at home.”

“So you’ve got here! I knew you’d work it some day.”

“You were very perspicacious.”

“I was. And there’s another thing I’ll tell you. You’ve got round the old man. Well, I’m not going to stand for it. See?”

“I see; but it’s got nothing to do with me. Your father’s given me a job. If you don’t want him to do it you ought to tackle him.”

Whatever war had done for Tad it had not ennobled him. The face was old and seamed and stained with a dark red flush. It was scowling too, with the helpless scowl of impotence. Tom was sorrier for him than he had ever been before.

Having taken his hat and stick, Tad strode off, turning only on the doorstep. “But there’s one thing I’ll say right now. If you’ve got a job at Meek and Brokenshire’s I’ll damn well have a better one. I’m going to keep my eye on you.”

Tom laughed, good-naturedly. “That’s the very

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best thing you could do. Nothing would please your father half so well. You'd buck him up, and at the same time get your knife into me."

As the door closed behind Tad Miss Nash came forward from somewhere in the obscurity. She was in that tremulous ecstasy which the mere sight of Tom always roused in her. She was so very sorry, but Mrs. Whitelaw wasn't able to receive him. If Tom would leave his package with her she would see that it was delivered.

On the next afternoon as Tom was leaving the office Whitelaw offered him a lift uptown. In the seclusion of the limousine the father spoke of Tad.

"He's a great care to me, but somehow I feel that you might do him good."

"He wouldn't let me. I can't get near him, except by force."

"But force is what he respects. In the bottom of his heart he respects you."

"What he needs is a job—the smallest job you could offer him in the bank. If you could put it to him as a sporting proposition that he was to get ahead of me . . ."

"That's what I'll try to do."

In the course of a few days the lift uptown had become a custom. Though he had never received instructions to that effect, Mr. Phips so shaped Tom's duties that he found himself leaving the office at the same moment as the banker. Once or twice when things did not so happen Whitelaw came into the room where Tom was at work to look for him. If

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no one else saw it Mr. Phips did, that the lift uptown was the big minute of the banker's day.

"I've got a son," the secretary pondered to himself, "but I'll be hanged if I feel about him like that. I suppose it's because I never lost him."

"Tad's applied to me for a job," the father informed Tom in the limousine one day. "The next thing will be to make him stick to it."

"I believe I could manage that, once we get him there," Tom said confidently. "I can't always make him drink, but I can hold his head to the water. I did that at college more than once."

"I know you did. I can't tell you . . ."

A tremor of the voice cut short this sentence, but Tom knew what would have been said: "I can't tell you what it means to me now to have some one to fall back upon. The children have given me a good deal of worry which their mother couldn't share because of her unhappiness. But now—I've got you." Tom was glad, however, that it had not been put into words.

XLVI

THEY came into May, the joyous, exciting, stimulating May of New York, with its laughing promise of adventure. To Tom Whitelaw that sense of adventure was in the happy sunlight, in the blue sky, in the scudding clouds, in winds that were warm and yet with the tang of salt and ice in them, in the flowers in the Park, in the gay dresses in the Avenue, in the tall young men already beginning to look summery, in the shop windows with their flowers, fruit, jewels, porcelains, and brocades, in the opulent crush of vehicles, and in his own heart most of all. Never before had he known such ecstasy of life. It was more than vigor of limb or the strong coursing of the blood. It was youth and love and expectation, with their call to the daring, the reckless, and the new.

They reached a Saturday. Business was taking Whitelaw to Boston. Tom went with him to the station, to carry his brief-case, to hand him his ticket, to check his bags, and perform the other small services of a clerk for the man of importance.

“I shall come back on Wednesday,” the banker explained to him, before entering the train. “On Thursday I shall not be at the office. It’s a day on which I never leave my wife. Though I often have to go abroad and leave her behind, I always manage it so that we may have that particular day together. I shall see you then on Friday.”

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He saw him, however, on Thursday, since Mr. Phips willed it so. At least, it was Mr. Phips who willed it, as far as Tom ever knew. About three on that day he came to Tom with a brief-case stuffed with documents.

“The Chief may want to run his eyes over these before he comes to the office to-morrow. Ask for himself. Don’t leave them with anybody else.”

To the best of Tom’s belief there was no staging of what happened next beyond that which was set by Phips’s intuitions.

By the time he rang at the house in Fifth Avenue it was a little after four. Admitted to the big dim hall, he heard a hum of voices coming from the sitting room. In Dadd’s manner there was some constraint.

“Will you step in here, sir, and I’ll tell the master that you’ve come?”

The library was on the same side of the house as the dining room, but it got the afternoon sun. The sun woke its colors to a burnished softness in which red and blue and green and gold melted into each other lovingly. A still, well-ordered room, little used by anyone, it gave the impression of a place of rest for ancient beauty and high thought. Rich and reposeful, there was nothing in it that was not a masterpiece, but a masterpiece which there was no one but some chance visitor to care anything about. In the four who made up the Whitelaw family there were too many aching human cares for knowledge or art to comfort.

Tom’s eyes studied absently the profile of a woman on an easel. She might have been a Botticelli; he

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didn't know. She only reminded him of Hildred—neatly piled dark hair, long slanting eyes, a small snub nose, and lips deliciously *moqueur*. The colors she wore were also Hildred's, subdued and yet ardent, umber round the shoulders, with a chain of emeralds that almost sparkled in the westering light.

Whitelaw entered with his quick and eager tread, his quick and eager seizing of the young man's hand. Again the left hand rested on his shoulder; again there was the deep and earnest searching of the eyes, as if a lost secret had not yet been found; again there was the little weary push.

“Come.”

Taking the brief-case into his own hands, he left Tom nothing to do but follow him. Diagonally crossing the hall, Tom noticed that the hum of voices had died down. Without knowing why he nerved himself for a test.

The test came at once. Whitelaw, having preceded him into the room, had carried his brief-case to a table, and at once went to work on the contents. Perhaps he did this purposely, to throw Tom on his own resources. In any case, it was on his own resources that he felt himself thrown the instant he appeared on the threshold. He judged from the face of anguish and protest which Mrs. Whitelaw turned on him that he was not expected. Dimly he perceived that Tad and Lily were in the room, and some one else whom as yet he hadn't time to see. All his powers were focused on the meeting of the woman who was not his mother, and didn't want him there.

He thought quickly. He would be on the safest

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side. He had come there as a clerk; as a clerk shown in among the family he would conduct himself. He bowed to Mrs. Whitelaw, who let him take her hand, though that too seemed to suffer at his touch; he bowed to Lily; he nodded respectfully to Tad. He turned to salute distantly the other person in the room, and found her coming towards him.

He knew her free swinging motion before he had time to see her face.

“Oh, Tom!”

“Why, Hildred!”

Her manner was the protecting one he had often seen in other years, when she thought he might be hurt, or be ignorant of small usages. She was subtle, tactful, and ready, all at once.

“Come over here.” She drew him to a seat on a sofa, beside herself. “Mrs. Whitelaw won’t mind, will you, Mrs. Whitelaw? You know, Tom and I are the greatest friends—have been for years.”

He forgot everyone else who was present in the joy and surprise of seeing her. “When did you come? Why didn’t you let me know?”

“I didn’t know myself till late last night, did I, Mrs. Whitelaw? Mrs. Whitelaw only wired to invite me after Mr. Whitelaw came back from Boston. Of course I wasn’t going to miss a chance like that. I don’t see New York oftener than once in two years or so. Then there was the chance of seeing you. I was ready in an hour. I took the ten o’clock train this morning, and have just this minute arrived.”

Only when these first few bits of information had been given and received did Tom feel the return of his

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embarrassment. He was in a room where three of the five others were troubled by his presence. He wasn't there of his own free will, and since he was a clerk he couldn't leave till he was dismissed. He would not have known what to do if Hildred hadn't kept a small conversation going, drawing into it first one and then another, till presently all were discussing the weather or something of equal importance. In spite of her emotion Mrs. Whitelaw did her best to sustain her rôle of hostess, Tad and Lily speaking only when they were spoken to. At a given minute Tad got up, sauntering toward the door.

He was stopped by his father. "Don't go, Tad. Tea will be here in a minute." The voice grew pleading. "Stay with us to-day."

Lighting a cigarette, Tad sank back into his chair, doing it rather sulkily. Whitelaw continued to draw papers from the brief-case, arranging them before him on the table.

When Dadd appeared with the tea-tray Tom made a push for escape. "If you've nothing else for me to do, sir . . ."

Whitelaw merely glanced up at him. "Wait a minute. Sit down again."

Tom went back to his seat beside Hildred, where he watched Mrs. Whitelaw as she poured the tea. It was the first time he had seen her in indoor dress, all lace and soft lavender, her pearls twisted once around her neck and descending to her waist, a great jewel on her breast. It was the first time, too, that he had seen her hair, which was fair and crinkly, like his own. Except for a slight portliness, she was

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too young to seem like the mother of Lily and Tad, while she was still less like his. That she should be his mother, this woman who had never known anything but what love and money could enrich her with, was too incongruous with everything else in life to call for so much as denial.

And as for the hundredth time he was saying this to himself Whitelaw spoke. He spoke without looking up from his papers except to take a sip of tea from the cup on the table beside him. He spoke casually, too, as if broaching something not of much importance.

“Now that we’re all here I think that perhaps it’s as good a time as any to go over the matter we’ve talked about separately—and settle it.”

There was no one in the room who didn’t know what he meant. Tad smoked listlessly; Lily set down her cup and lighted a cigarette; Mrs. Whitelaw’s jeweled fingers played among the tea-things, as if she must find something for her hands to do or shriek aloud. Tom’s heart seemed turned to stone, to have no power of emotion. Hildred was the only one who said anything.

“Hadn’t I better go, Mr. Whitelaw? I haven’t been up to my room yet.”

“No, Hildred. I’d rather that you stayed, if you don’t mind. It’s the reason we’ve asked you to come.”

He looked at no one. His face was a little white, though he was master of himself.

“This is the tenth of May. It’s twenty-three years ago to-day since we lost our little boy. I want to ask

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the family, now that we're all together, what they think of the chances of our having found him again."

Though he knew it was an anniversary in the family, it was Tom's first recollection of the date. In as far as it was his birthday, birthdays had been meaningless to him, except as he remembered that they had come and gone, and made him a year older.

"Personally," Whitelaw went on, "I've fought this off so long that I can't do it any longer. It will be five years this summer since I first saw him, at Dublin, New Hampshire, and was struck with his looks and his name, as well as with the little I learned of his history."

"Why didn't you do something about it then," Tad put in, peevishly, "if you were going to do anything at all?"

"You're quite right, Tad. It's what I should have done. I was dissuaded by the rest of you. I must confess, too, that I was afraid to take it up myself. We'd followed so many clues that led to nothing! But perhaps it's just as well, as it's given me time to make all the investigation that, it seems to me, has been possible."

Apart from the motion of Tad's and Lily's hands as they put their cigarettes to their lips, everyone sat motionless and tense. Even Mrs. Whitelaw tamed her feverish activity to a more feverish stillness. Hildred put her hand lightly on Tom's sleeve to remind him that she was there, but the power of feeling anything had gone out of him. While Whitelaw told his facts he listened as if the case had nothing to do with himself.

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His agents, so the banker said, had probably unearthed every detail in the story that was now to be known.

On August 5, 1895, Thomas Coburn had been married in The Bronx, to Lucy Speight. Coburn was a carpenter who had fallen from a roof in the following October, and had died a few days later of his injuries. Their child, Grace Coburn, had been born in The Bronx on March 5, 1896, and had died on April 21, 1897. After that all trace of the mother had been lost, though a woman who killed herself by poisoning in the Female House of Detention in the suburb of New Rotterdam, after having been arrested for shop-lifting, on December 24, 1904, might be considered as the same person. This woman had been known to such neighbors as could remember her as Mrs. Lucy Coburn, though at the time of her arrest she had claimed to be the widow of Theodore Whitelaw, after having married Thomas Coburn as her first husband. The wardress who had talked to her on taking her to a cell recalled that she had been incoherent and contradictory in all her statements about herself, her husband, and her child.

As a matter of fact, the early history of Lucy Speight had been traced. She was the daughter of a laboring man at Chatham, in the neighborhood of Albany. Her mental inheritance had been poor. Her father had been the victim of drink, her mother had died insane. One of her sisters had died insane, and a brother had been put at an early age in a home for the feeble-minded. A brother and two sisters still lived either at Chatham or at Pittsfield. He had in his

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hand photographs of all the living members of the family, and copies of photographs of those deceased, including two of Lucy Speight as she was as a young girl.

He turned toward Tom. "Would you like to look at them?"

The power of emotion came back to him with a rush. He remembered his mother, vividly in two or three attitudes or incidents, but otherwise faintly. A flush that stained his cheek with the same dark red which dissipation stamped on Tad's made the brothers look more than ever alike as he crossed the room to take the pictures from his father's hand.

There were a dozen or fourteen of them, all of poor rustic boys and girls, or men and women, feebleness in the cast of their faces, the hang of their lips, the vacancy of their eyes. Standing to sort them out, he put aside quickly the two of Lucy Speight. One of them must have dated from 1894, or thereabouts, because of the big sleeves; the other, with skin-tight shoulders, was that of a girl perhaps in 1889. In their faded simper there was almost nothing of the wild dark prettiness with which he saw her in memory, and yet he could recreate it.

He stood and gazed long, all eyes fixed on him. Moving to the table where Mrs. Whitelaw sat behind the tray, he held the two pictures before her.

"That's my mother."

Though he said this without thought of its significance, and only from the habit of thinking of Lucy Speight as really his mother, he saw her shrink. With a glance at the photographs, she glanced up at him,

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piteously, begging to be spared. Even such contact as this, remote, pictorial only, with people of a world she had never so much as touched, hurt her fastidiousness. That the son of this poor half-witted creature, this Lucy Speight, should also be her son . . . but the only protest she could make was in her eyes.

Tom did not sit down again as Whitelaw continued with his facts; he stood at the end of the mantelpiece, with its candelabra in *biscuit de Sèvres*. Leaning with his elbow on the white marble edge, he had all the others facing him, as all the others had him. The attitude seemed best to accord with the position in which he felt himself, that of a prisoner at the bar.

“We’ve found no record in any State in the Union,” Whitelaw went on, “or in any Province in Canada, of a marriage between a Theodore Whitelaw and a Lucy Coburn or Speight. The search has been pretty thorough. Moreover, we find no birth recorded in The Bronx of any Thomas Whitelaw during all the decade between 1890 and 1900. No such birth is recorded in any other suburb of New York, or in Manhattan. In years past I’ve been on the track of three men of the name of Theodore Whitelaw, one in Portland, Maine, one in New Orleans, and one in Vancouver; but there’s reason for thinking that all three were one and the same man. He was a Scotch sailor, who died on the Pacific coast, and was never known to be in or about New York longer than the two or three days in which his ship was in port.”

He came to the circumstances, largely gathered from Tom himself, of the association of the woman

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with the child. She had harped on the statements, first, that she had not stolen him; secondly, that he was not to think that his name was Whitelaw. And yet on the night before her death she had not only given him that very name, but claimed it as legally her own. The boy—the man, as he was now—could remember that at different times she had called herself by different names, chiefly to escape detection for her thefts; but never before that night had she taken that of Whitelaw.

Those who had worked on the case, the most skilful investigators in the country, were driven to a theory. It was a theory based only on the circumstantial, but so broadly based that the one unproven point, that which absolutely showed identity, seemed to prove itself.

Lucy Coburn, feeble in mind from birth, half demented by the death first of her husband and then of her child, had prowled about the Park, looking for a baby that would satisfy her thwarted mother-love. Any baby would have done this, though she preferred a girl.

“My son, Henry Elphinstone Whitelaw, was born on September 24, 1896. He was eight months old when on May 10, 1897, he was wheeled into the Park by Miss Nash, who is still with us. What happened after, as she supposed, she wheeled him back, we all know about.”

But the theory was that, at some minute when Miss Nash's attention was diverted, the prowling woman got possession of the child, through means which were still a matter of speculation. She had money,

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since it was known that five thousand dollars had been paid to her by a life-insurance company on her husband's death, and, therefore, the power of flitting about, and covering up her traces. Discovering that she had a boy and not a girl, she had given him the first name she could think of, which was that of her late husband. She could easily have learned from the papers that the child she had stolen was the son of Henry Theodore Whitelaw, though the full name may or may not have remained in a memory probably not retentive at its best. But on the night of her arrest, knowing that she was about to forsake the child for whom she had come to feel a passionate affection, she had made one last wild effort to connect him with his true inheritance. Why she had done this but partially was again a matter of conjecture. She may have given all of the name she remembered; she may have been kept from giving the full name through fear. It was impossible to tell. But she gave the name—with some errors, it was true—but still the name. The name taken with the extraordinary family resemblance—everyone would admit that—was one of the main points in the reconstruction of the history.

He reviewed a few more of the proofs and the half-proofs, asking at last, timidly, and as if afraid of the family verdict:

“Well, what does everyone say?”

The silence was oppressive. The only movement on anyone's part came when Lily stretched out her hand to a tray and with her little finger knocked off the ash from her cigarette. It seemed to Tom as if

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none of them would speak, as if he himself must speak first.

“I vote we take him in.” This was Tad. “Since we all know you want him, father—well, that settles it. As far as I’m concerned I’ll—I’ll crawl down.”

Lily shrugged her slim shoulders. “I don’t care one way or another. I’ve got my own affairs to think of. If he doesn’t interfere with me I won’t interfere with him.” Again she knocked off the ash of her cigarette. “Have him, if you want to.”

It was Mrs. Whitelaw’s turn. She sat still, pensive. The clock could be heard ticking. Her husband gazed at her as if his life would depend on what she had to say. Tom himself went numb again. She spoke at last.

“If you’re satisfied, Henry, I’m satisfied. All I ask in the world is that you—” she gasped her little sob—“is that you shall be happy.” Rising she walked straight up to Tom. “I want to kiss you.”

When he had bent his head she kissed him on the forehead, formally, sacramentally. She went back to her seat.

Without moving from his place at the table, Whitelaw smiled across the room at Tom, a smile of relief and tenderness.

“Well, what do you say?”

Tom looked down at Hildred, noting her strange expression. It was not a satisfied expression; rather it was challenging, defiant of something, he didn’t know of what. But he couldn’t now consider Hildred; he couldn’t consider anyone but himself. He did not change his position, leaning on the white

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marble mantelpiece; nor was his tone other than conversational.

“I’m awfully sorry, sir—I’m sorry to say it to you especially—but it’s—it’s not good enough.”

With the slightest possible movement of the head Hildred made him a sign of proud approval. White-law’s smile went out.

“What’s not good enough?”

“The—the welcome—home.”

Tad spluttered, indignantly. “What the devil do you want? Do you expect us to put up an arch?”

“No; I don’t expect anything. I should only like you to understand that though it isn’t easy for you, it’s easier for you than for me.”

Tad turned to his father. “Now you’re getting it! I could have told you beforehand, if you’d consulted me.”

“You see,” Tom continued, paying no attention to the interruption, “you’re all different from me. You’re used to different things, to different standards and ways of thinking. If I were to come in among you the only phrase that would describe me is the homely one of the fish out of water. I should be gasping for breath. I couldn’t live in your atmosphere.”

Tad was again the only one to voice a comment. “Well, I’ll be damned!”

Tom’s legs which had quaked at first, began to be surer under him. “Please don’t think I’m venturing to criticize anyone or anything. This is your life, and it suits you. It wouldn’t suit me because it isn’t mine. The past makes me as it makes you, and it’s too late now to unmake us. It’s possible that I may

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be Harry Whitelaw. When I hear the evidence that can be produced I can almost think I am. But if I *am* Harry Whitelaw by birth, I'm *not* Harry Whitelaw by life and experience. I can't go back and be made over. I'm myself as I stand." Still having in his hand the pictures of Lucy Speight, he held them out. "To all intents and purposes this is—my mother."

"And I kissed you!"

Tom smiled. "Yes, but you don't know how she kissed me. I do. She loved me. I loved her. I've tried—I've tried my very best—to turn my back on her—to call her a thief—and any other name that would blacken her—and—and I can't do it."

The sleeping lioness in the mother was roused suddenly. Leaving her place behind the tea-table, she advanced near enough to him to point to the two photographs.

"Do you mean to say that—having the choice between—that—and me—you choose—that?"

"I don't choose. I can't do anything else. It isn't what you think that rules your life; it's what you love. I'm one of the people to whom love means more than anything else. I daresay it's a weakness—especially in a man—but that's the way it is."

"If your first stipulation is love . . ."

"Wouldn't it be yours, Onora?"

"I'd try to be reasonable—when so many concessions have been made."

"Yes," Tom hastened to say, "but that's just my point. I'm not asking for concessions. The minute

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they must be made—well, I'm not there. I couldn't come into your family—on concessions.”

Whitelaw spoke up again. “I don't blame you.”

Tom tried to make his position clearer. “It's a little like this. A long time ago I was coming along by the Hudson in the train. I was on my way to New York with the man who had adopted me, after I'd been a State ward. There was a steamer on the river, and I watched her—coming *from* I didn't know where—going *to* I didn't know where. And it came to me then that she was something like myself. I didn't know what port I'd sailed from; nor what port I was making for. But now that I'm twenty-three—if that's my age—I see this: that once in so often I touched at some happy isle, where the people took me in and were good to me. It was what carried me along.”

The mother broke in, reproachfully. “Happy isles—full of convicts and murderers!”

“Yes; but they were happy. The convicts and murderers were kind. A homeless boy doesn't question the moral righteousness of the people who give him food and shelter and clothes, and, what's more, all their best affection. What it comes to is this, that having lived in those happy isles—awhile in one, awhile in another—I don't want to go ashore at an unhappy one, even though I was born there.”

Springing to his feet, Tad bore down on him. “Do you know what I call you? I call you an ass.”

“Very likely. I'm only trying to explain to you why I can't be your brother—even if I am—your brother.”

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“It’s because you don’t want to be—and you damn well know it.”

“That may be another way of putting it; but I’m not putting it that way.”

Lily rose languidly, throwing out her words to nobody in particular. “I think he’s a good sport, if you ask me. I wouldn’t come into a family like us—not the way we are.”

“Wait, Lily,” Whitelaw cried, as she was sauntering out. He too got to his feet. “You’ve all spoken. You’ve done the best you could. I’m not blaming anyone. Now I want you all to understand—” He indicated Tom—“that this is *my son*. I know he’s my son. I claim him as my son. Not even what he says himself can make any difference to me.”

Tom strode across the room, grasping the other’s hand. “Yes, sir; and you’re my father. I know that too, and I claim you on my side. But we’ll stop right there. It’s as far as we can go. I’ll be your son in every sense but that of—” He looked round about on them all—“but that of being your heir or a member of your family. I can’t do that; but—between you and me—everything is understood.”

He got out of the room with dignity. Passing Tad, he nodded, and said, “Thanks!” To Lily he said, “Thank you too. It was bully, what you said.” Reaching the mother whom he didn’t know and who didn’t know him, he bowed low. Sitting again behind the tea-table, she lifted her hand for him to take it. He took it and kissed it. Her little soblike gasp followed him as he passed into the big dim hall.

He had taken no leave of Hildred, because he knew

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she would do what actually she did; but he didn't know that she would speak the words he heard spoken.

“I'm going with him, dear Mrs. Whitelaw; but I shan't be long. I just don't want him to go away alone because—because I mean to marry him.”

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AS they went down the steps she took his arm. "Tom, darling, I'm proud of you. Now they know where we stand, both of us."

"It was splendid of you, Hildred, to play up like that. It backs me tremendously that you're not afraid to own me. But, you know, what I've just said will put us farther apart."

"Oh, I don't know about that. Father said we couldn't be engaged unless you were acknowledged as Mr. Whitelaw's son; and you have been. He never said anything about your being Mrs. Whitelaw's son. This is a case in which it's the father that counts specially."

"But I couldn't take any of his money beyond what I earned."

"Oh, but that wouldn't make any difference."

They crossed the Avenue and entered the Park. They entered the Park because it was the obvious place in which to look for a little privacy. All the gay sweet life of the May afternoon was at its brightest. Riders were cantering up and down the bridle-path; friends were strolling; children were playing; birds were flying with bits of string or straw for the building of their nests. To Tom and Hildred the gladness was thrown out by the deeper gladness in themselves.

"But you don't know how poor we'll be."

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“Oh, don't I? Where do you think I keep my eyes? Why, I expect to be poor when I marry—for a while at any rate. I expect to do my own housework, like most of the young married women I know.”

“Oh, but you've always talked so much about servants.”

“Yes, dear Tom, but that was to be on a desert island where we were to be all alone. We shan't find that island except in our hearts.”

“But even without the island, I always supposed that when a girl like you got married she . . .”

“She began with an establishment on the scale of ours in Louisburg Square, at the least. Yes, that used to be the way, twenty or thirty years ago. But I'm sorry to say it isn't so any longer. Talk about revolution! We've got revolution as it is. With rents and wages as they are, and all the other expenses, why, a young couple must begin with the simple life, or stay single. I'd rather begin with the simple life, and I know more about it than you think.”

He laughed. “So I see.”

“Oh, I can cook and sew and make beds and wash dishes. . . .”

They sauntered on, without noticing where they were going, till they came to a dell, where in the shade of an elm there was a seat, and another near a heart-shaped clump of lilacs, all in bloom. They sat in the shade of the elm. They were practical young lovers, and yet they were young lovers. They were lovers for whom there had never been any lovers but themselves. The wonderful thing was that each felt what the other felt; the discoveries by which they had come

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to the knowledge of this fact were the first that had ever been made.

"Oh, Tom, do you feel like that? Why, that's just the way I feel."

"Is it, Hildred? Well, it shows we were made for each other, doesn't it, because I never thought that anyone felt like that but me?"

"Well, no one ever did but me. Only Tom, dear, tell me when it was that you first began to fall in love with me."

"It was the night—a winter's night—five, six, seven years ago—when I found Guy in a mix-up with a lot of hoodlums in the snow."

"And you brought him home. That was the first time you ever saw me."

"Yes, it was the first time I ever saw you that I began . . ."

"And I began then, too. Since that evening, there's never been anybody else. Oh, Tom, was there ever anybody else with you?"

Tom thought of Maisie. "Not—not really."

"Well, unreally then?"

As he made his confession she listened eagerly. "Yes, that *was* unreally. And you never heard anything more about her?"

"Oh, yes. When I was in Boston a few weeks ago I went to see her aunt. She told me that Maisie had been married for the last two years to a traveling salesman she'd been in love with for a long time, and that she had a baby."

The thought of Maisie brought back the thought of

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Honey; and the thought of Honey woke him to the fact that he had been on this spot before.

“Why—why, Hildred! This is the very bench on which Miss Nash and the other nurse were sitting—”

“When you were stolen?”

“When somebody was stolen.” He looked round him. “And there’s Miss Nash over there!”

On the bench near the lilacs Miss Nash was seated with a book.

“We ought to go and speak to her,” Hildred suggested.

Miss Nash received them with her beatific look. “I saw you leave the house. I thought you’d come here. I followed you. I had something to do, something I swore to God I’d do the day my little boy came back. I’d—” She held up a novel of which the open pages were already yellowing—“I’d finish this. *Juliet Allingham’s Sin* is the name of it. I was just at the scene where the lover drowns when my little boy was taken. I’ve never opened the book since; but I’ve kept it by me.” She rose, weeping. “Now I can finish it—but I’ll go home.”

Sitting down on the seat she had left free for them, they began to talk of the scene of the afternoon, which as yet they had avoided.

“I hope I didn’t hurt their feelings.”

“They didn’t mind hurting yours.”

“They didn’t mean to. They thought they were generous.”

“Which only shows . . .”

“But *he’s* all right. Hildred, he’s a big man.”

“And you really think he’s your father, Tom?”

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"I know he is. Everything makes me sure of it."

"Well, then, if he's your father, she must be your mother."

"Yes, but I don't go that far. It isn't what must be that I think about; it's what *is*."

She persisted in her logic. "And Tad and Lily must be your brother and sister."

"They can be what they like. I don't care anything about them."

"It's only your mother that you don't . . ."

He got up, restlessly. It was easier to reconstruct the scene which Honey had described to him than to let her bring what she was saying too sharply to a point.

"It was over here that the baby carriage stood, right in the heart of this little clump." She followed him into it. "Miss Nash and the other nurse were over there, where we were sitting first. And right here, just where I'm standing, the queer thing must have happened."

"Are you sorry it happened, Tom?"

"You mean, if it actually happened to me. Why, no; and yet—yes. I can't tell. I'm sorry not to have grown up with—with my father. And yet if I had, I should have missed—all the other things—Honey—and perhaps you."

"Oh, you couldn't have missed me, I couldn't have missed you. We might not have met in the way we did meet, but we'd have met."

He hardly heard her last words, because he was staring off along the path by which they themselves

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had come down. His tone was puzzled, scarcely more than a whisper.

“Hildred, look!”

“Why, it’s Mr. and Mrs. Whitelaw. She’s changed her dress. How young she looks with that kind of flowered hat. I remember now. They always come here on the tenth of May. They’ve been here already this morning. Lily told me so. I know what it is. They’re looking for you. Miss Nash has told them where we are. I’m going to run.”

“Don’t run far,” he begged of her. “I can’t imagine what’s up.”

He stood where he was, watching their advance. It was not his place to go forward, since he wasn’t sure that he was wanted. He only thought he must be when, as they reached the bench beneath the elm, Whitelaw pointed him out and let his wife go on alone.

She came on in the hurried way in which she did everything, her great eyes brimming, as they often were, with unshed tears. At the entrance among the lilacs she held out both her hands, their diamonds upward, as if he was to kiss them. He took the hands, but lightly, barely touching them, keeping on his guard.

“Harry!” The staccato sentences came out as little breathless cries torn from a heart that tried to keep them back. “Harry! You—you needn’t—love me—or be my son—or live with us—unless—unless you like—but I want you to—to let me kiss you—just once—the way—the way your other—mother—used to.”

THE END

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